

**A comparison of ll. 247-342 of the editions of *The Proverbs of Alfred* –
advice on choosing a wife and the medieval literary view of women**

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The Proverbs of Alfred is a twelfth century didactic poem that survives today in four different thirteenth century manuscripts. The poem is set in the time of King Alfred (ca. eighth century) and there is a frame story in the poem inside which King Alfred offers life advice to his male subjects. The lines 247-342 addressed in this thesis contain advice on choosing a wife and misogynistic warnings on how evil and deceitful women are. There is also advice on how to deal with wives.

In this thesis I will try to shed light onto the social status of women in the Anglo-Saxon England and offer viewpoints and explanations to the tradition of Middle English misogyny in literature. I shall also discuss the possible audience and the purpose of the text and compare the research findings and notes of Olof Arngart, Edvard Borgström and Walter Skeat who have re-edited the manuscripts in the twentieth century.

Key words: The Proverbs of Alfred, proverbs, misogyny, Anglo-Saxon poetry, Anglo-Saxon women, women's social status in the Middle Ages.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is a section in a thirteenth century Early Middle English poem called *The Proverbs of Alfred*. The poem is a collection of proverbial sayings and in this thesis, the focus of the study is a specific passage in the poem (ll. 247-342) that deal with women and wives, and more precisely, how men should deal with women and wives. The reason for a limited line range was that I wanted to study a passage in the text that was well defined and suitable in length (95 lines) for the purpose of this thesis. The passage, furthermore, stands relatively well out as a separate section beside the rest of the text as they are, as mentioned, the only lines in the poem written on women altogether.

There are two things behind the motivation for addressing the poem. Firstly, in the four existing manuscripts of *The Proverbs of Alfred* there occur textual differences – different word choices, spelling errors, misunderstandings of the scribe and intentional modification. The textual differences, however, not restricted only to the manuscripts or their editions but can also be found in its commenting literature. For example, Cannon (2010) discusses the poem in his paper *Proverbs and the wisdom of literature: The Proverbs of Alfred and Chaucer's Tale of Melibee*. He studies a certain stanza of the poem and uses a peculiar word choice which alters the meaning of sentence and the thus also the meaning of the passage in which it occurs (please refer to page 49 of this thesis). I wanted to compare the editions of *The Proverbs of Alfred* as there are also scholarly disagreement when it comes to textual factors, and offer also my views for discussion wherever possible. On the whole, I find textual commentary important because of the controversies I have found. Furthermore, when analysing the text, I wanted to be as precise as possible of the correct readings and word choices, as the textual practices of Early Middle English differ from those in Present Day English.

Secondly, a reason for choosing this section of the poem is my general interest in the message of the poem concerning the specific line range. I wanted to see what *The Proverbs of Alfred* said of women and what the arguments and reasoning considering wife-choice are. As mentioned, women are mentioned on 95 lines of the poem whereas the poem itself contains 456 lines. In the section addressing women, there is a misogynous attitude seen

throughout the text. I wanted to see whether it was the way women were treated in texts at the time of writing and if there was something that could be said in favour of another kind of view. There are two research questions addressed in this thesis. Firstly: Does all literature contemporary to *The Proverbs of Alfred* treat female characters with a misogynous attitude only? Are there any texts that have a different approach? And secondly: How do textual features – most importantly word choices – reinforce the message of disdain? Are there any crucial differences in the manuscripts or any commentary literature to them (e.g. papers and editions) that might for example persuade the reader to take the advice in earnest, or something that would hint of the use of sarcasm? I set out with the assumption that there must have been something to contradict the misogyny, a literary approach that showed women in positive light.

In spite of the date of its composition, *The Proverbs of Alfred* is concerned with the time of Anglo-Saxon England with King Alfred as its wise ruler, that is, the latter half of the 9th century. The poem has a frame story in which King Alfred has organised a meeting for noblemen and churchmen to teach them his wisdom concerning good leadership and manners and life in general. The poem consists of many sections, almost all of which start with a phrase “Þus queþ Alured”, in Present Day English “So says Alfred”. All the sections of *The Proverbs of Alfred* are named and some described more closely later in this thesis.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have defined shortly what it is meant with a ‘proverb’ both in the traditional sense, and in the sense the term is used in *The Proverbs of Alfred*. I shall discuss the term and the definition later on in more detail and, after that, I shall discuss how the traditional definition differs when talking about the ‘proverbs’ in *The Proverbs of Alfred* which are, as we will see, more precisely termed ‘advice’ or moral sayings. The thesis proceeds from the traditional definition of a proverb to describing a larger concept of proverbial sayings and to introducing a literary genre called wisdom literature. In the analysis section I offer my commentaries and discussion of the chosen text passage. I will also look at the tradition in which a woman is represented in Middle English texts.

I set out to read the text with the assumption that *The Proverbs of Alfred* would have given some humorous advice concerning marriage life but soon noticed that the attitudes towards women are far from neutral, and instead very misogynous. I will come back to this term as I find its use is not fully correct when talking about the eighth and ninth century (time of setting) or the 1200-1300's (time of writing) as societal values were different back then. It is also, on the other hand, to keep in mind that this is a poetical text and as such, not a direct representation or record of the time of writing let alone the eighth and ninth century society and on the basis of this text, no real conclusions of attitudes towards women in the society can be drawn.

The different societal situation and the biased advice in *The Proverbs of Alfred* was to my belief in general not meant as a direct act of hate-speech towards women. In this thesis I have discussed woman's societal status and place in every section of the analysis and I try to offer explanations for the misogyny present in the *Proverbs of Alfred* and challenge it. Nevertheless, as I will explain later, it is not possible to find an exhaustive answer on how well the misogynous attitudes in the text really echoed the everyday of women of the Anglo-Saxon era as there is little information on their behalf. Literature of those times about women is very scarce and where it can be found, it is almost always written by or written of noblewomen, and there exists no encompassing registers on the life that laywomen led (Jewell 1996: 15-16, Mate 1999: 4).

I find *The Proverbs of Alfred* to be – however seriously the 'advice' in it was meant at the time of writing – quite a typical example of 1300's poetry as a specimen of a text in which women are treated in the way how the Bible treats Eve. The longer back one goes in time, the more there was the dichotomy of the woman character into sacred or sinful, good or evil (later in this thesis called the Eve/Mary type division) which was, nevertheless, above all a stylistic device and probably quite a popular one as well.

2 ON SECONDARY SOURCES AND TERMS

Before proceeding, I will briefly explain some of the choices I have made during the writing of this thesis. Firstly, I will have to comment on the secondary sources used when analysing *The Proverbs of Alfred* as some of them are

relatively dated. The explanation and justification for their use is found below (see section 2.1). Also the term 'misogyny' mentioned in the introduction necessitates some clarification. It is used throughout this thesis to refer to the attitudes prevalent in the poem. The term, nevertheless, carries some connotations that are not entirely applicable when studying a thirteenth-century text and for that reason I will offer some comments on the use of it in this thesis (section 2.2).

2.1 Secondary Sources

The Proverbs of Alfred is written in Early Middle English and survives in four manuscripts. It has been re-edited various times in the beginning of the twentieth century, for example by Skeat (1907) and Borgström (1908). Overall, it was studied rather widely in the early 1900's and there is a comprehensive study of two volumes made of it in 1942 and 1955 by Olaf Arngart. The first volume (1942) is a study of the existing editions by various scholars of all the four manuscripts of *The Proverbs of Alfred* and the second (1955) contains new editions, made by Arngart, of all four manuscripts. Rouse (2005: 14) states that the abovementioned works "comprise the most substantial study of the text in the last sixty years". Furthermore, he states that after Arngart's works, relatively little has been written on *The Proverbs of Alfred* and summarises that "Arngart's study of the Proverbs represents the culmination of the previous hundred years' interest in the text" (ibid.).

In accordance with what Rouse states, it has been challenging to locate sources that are written about *The Proverbs of Alfred* later than the works of Arngart. At present there are no comparable studies to be found, the latest being Cannon's *Proverbs and the wisdom of literature: The Proverbs of Alfred and Chaucer's Tale of Melibee* (2010). When trying to find information on precisely this text, I have therefore had to resort into some rather old study material and references. The newer studies I have used are concentrated on the overall analysis of proverbs, their definition and structure, and for example proverbs in modern day use. Only the more dated reference books offer insight to the specific text I am interested in. Furthermore, I have found that the misogynistic attitudes present in the sayings in *The Proverbs of Alfred* are

relatively well commented in the old studies and articles that I have used (for example, Lucas (1965), who has discussed misogynous proverbs on a large scale. In the older sources I have also found specific commentary on proverbs that are written about women, wives and marriage life and good general references to Early Middle English poetry.

2.2 Misogyny

As mentioned, I will be using the terms 'misogynous' and 'misogyny' when referring to an attitude towards women that seemed to prevail in the time of writing *The Proverbs of Alfred*. 'Misogyny' is a term that in general means 'woman-hating': "Hatred or dislike of, or prejudice against women" (*OED*, s.v. "misogyny", n.). Misogynous is its adjective, describing for example an act that can be considered as derogatory, hostile or in any other a hurtful act that is specifically targeted towards women. In this thesis both terms are applied to written text and to discussion based on it.

The terms misogyny and misogynous are, when discussing *The Proverbs of Alfred*, used for example by Arngart (1955: 3). When referring back to the twelfth and thirteenth century however, they are not entirely appropriate for the following reasons: Firstly, the attitudes towards women seem not to have been 'woman-hating' but it was, rather, taken for granted that women are in some ways inferior to men. This followed largely from the teachings of the Bible, which were regarded very highly. "That women were by nature inferior to men", states Clark (1997: 114), was a "most thoroughly commonplace idea" (*ibid.*), as well as the idea of woman as the easily seducible 'weaker vessel': There was, in the realm of church, a rather deeply engraved hatred towards women based on Eve, who, infamously, was the first one ever to be tempted by the Devil to commit sin (Clark 1997: 113-114). Quoting Mann (2002: 1), "[t]he polarized nature of medieval attitudes to women is notorious. Eve is set against Mary, the sensual deceiver against maternal purity, rebelliousness against meekness [...] Yet this ambivalence is not a specifically medieval phenomenon; its roots can be traced back at least to Roman antiquity[.]" where there was literature that acted as catalyst in building the stereotyped images of woman (Mann 2002: 1).

Secondly, as the term 'misogynous' can also be used in the sense 'anti-feministic', it has to be noted that there was of course no prevalent debate of women's rights during those times in any similar sense that we understand the term today. And for that, it is therefore to be kept in mind that neither men nor women themselves even seemed to question the attitude too greatly but saw that as a normal way of organising the society. To quote Mate (1999: 99-100),

[i]n a hierarchical society in which children were subservient to their parents, and servants to their employers, it was not surprising that so many women accepted the authority of fathers or husbands. A woman who believed she was weaker than a man, not only physically, but morally and intellectually (less rational) did not question the right of her father to choose her husband and her husband to manage her property.

It was, in a sense, not the contemporary men's (or women's) 'fault' that the attitudes were as they were; they would not have been perceived as unfair or hostile. In the eyes of a modern reader, the ideas present in *The Proverbs of Alfred* seem different than they would have been in the eyes of the general folk of those days. Nevertheless, according to Clark (1997: 114), the kinds of "dismal misogynisms", as they appear to us, found in old writings and documents, greatly stressing the lower understanding and sometimes the 'viciousness' of women, have nowadays "often been reviewed and, in recent years, often regretted" as they have contributed in "promoting aggression against women on a European scale" (ibid.).

On literature contributing to misogyny, Mann (2002: 2) writes that even if many medieval works of literature tell us of the appreciation and demand of paradox and disputation, rather than of principled misogyny, the inevitable result still was the reinforcement of the 'Eve'-stereotype. As Clark, also Mann (2002: 2) and Mieder (1993: 65, 71) find the results saddening. To continue their views, individual works, such as *The Proverbs of Alfred*, probably would not *alone* have contributed to the phenomenon in major detail, but it is to be kept in mind that it was not the only text carrying those attitudes but one of many. Furthermore, it was a rather popular read in its time (Cannon 2010: 412) since even nowadays four MSS survive, and certainly has retained the 'popular'

attitude of good/bad woman, preferring the latter, thus again reinforcing the prevalent view.

Clark and Mann mention an idea of “conventional misogyny” (Clark 1997: 117, Mann 2002: 26) and, although I stressed above that the ‘misogyny’ in the Anglo-Saxon society was not all intentional, it is to be noted that it was up to a point a natural way of social life. Following that, the kinds of attitudes present not only in *The Proverbs of Alfred* but also in a massive amount of older and newer other literature are nowadays regarded as anti-feministic and are to an extent also regarded to contribute to the persisting inequality between men and women. For these reasons, I have decided to apply the term ‘misogyny’ to *The Proverbs of Alfred* even though it does not represent exactly the same thing in the thirteenth-century literary context as it does today. Nevertheless, old narratives depicted women either as ‘Eve’ or ‘Mary’ type and the image is believed to affect attitudes even today. For both these reasons I have considered it important to look the attitudes and comment on them in the analysis section of this thesis.

3 THE PROVERBS OF ALFRED

In my thesis, the primary source is *The Proverbs of Alfred*, re-edited from the Trinity and Jesus MSS by Walter William Skeat in 1907. By the time he published his edited version, *The Proverbs of Alfred* edited from the Trinity MS had already been published three times (Skeat 1907: iii). He justified the new issue with stating that his objective was to give a correct text of the manuscript, which had until that far been reproduced all three times very incorrectly. Simultaneously, he wished to offer a full account on the spellings and spelling mistakes of the Trinity MS (ibid.). In the introduction of his edition, Skeat goes through the Trinity MS scribe’s choices in great detail. When discussing the miswritings in the Trinity MS, it should be noted that the Jesus MS is not free of mistakes either. Some findings that Skeat (1907) has listed in his edition are placing letters in wrong order and erring in letters (xii) and along with this statement, Skeat also notes (ibid.) that the scribe seemingly has been copying an older manuscript which he has occasionally misread and has thus miswritten words in his own work. This is in accordance with Arngart’s statement above

that none of the now extant MSS is the original but there exists at least one manuscript between the archetype of *The Proverbs of Alfred* and the present-day MSS. The errors of the Jesus MS are few compared to the Trinity MS, of which Skeat has written several detailed pages. When giving notes on grammar, he again states the Jesus MS to be more trustworthy in grammatical details (1907: xxviii).

Skeat has included an explanatory notes section at the end of the edited texts along with a comprehensive glossary, of which both I have made great use of in studying the text and then reproducing a part of it in Present-Day English. Another work which I also have made great use of is *The Proverbs of Alfred* edited by Edvard Borgström, who similarly studied the Trinity and the Jesus MSS in 1908. Borgström's edition contains similar kinds of glossarial index and explanatory notes to those of Skeat and I have also made use of and referred to Borgström's commentaries of both the MS's editions for the purpose of getting a wider insight into the language used and a more encompassing understanding of the texts. I have applied the explanatory notes of Arngart (1955) wherever possible, but they could not be put in as much use as those of Skeat's and Borgström's owing to the fact that in his work, Arngart has compared all the four existing manuscripts of *The Proverbs of Alfred* and offers therefore mainly detailed comparative notes of them all.

The Proverbs of Alfred comprises 23 sections with an additional fourteen found in one manuscript of the four surviving MSS. The sections of the poem are numbered from section one onwards with A and a number, for example A.15., which is the start of my study material. One section holds a number of stanzas, and poetic impression is created most often with rhyme or alliteration (using a certain letter at the beginning of paired lines, such as '**Ne** wurþ þu neuer so wod / **ne** so wyn-drunke). Alliteration seems to have been the originally applied stylistic device (Arngart 1942: 76), but there seems, however, to be a trend especially in one of the MSS for the scribe to switch it into self-made rhyme. The topics of the sections handle with good and just reigning, proper way of life and managing family. Skeat (1907) names sections according to the topic on the top margin of his edition. As there may be two or more original sections per edition page, some sections are left without a name and in some the division is vague. Therefore, in the analysis section I provide an

additional topic (Woman is deceitful, lines 306-316) to better match the text and topic. The naming by Skeat after the Jesus MS is as seen below (approximate line range given in numbers after the topic, bold for the section covered in this thesis):

Name	Corresponding lines in Skeat's edition of the Jesus MS
The Prologue	1-24
King Alfred's Address, Excellence of Christ	25-60
Duties of a King.....	61-72
Duties of Leaders.....	73-85
Duties of a Knight.....	86-98
The Value of Wisdom.....	99-132
Good May Follow Evil	133-158
Life is Short.....	159-179
Be Not Proud of Wealth	180-194
Wisdom Excels All Things.....	195-225
Tell No Grief to Thy Foe.....	226-246
Choose No Evil Wife	247-284
Keep Thy Wife Busy	285-316
(of which ll. 306-316: Woman is deceitful; as named by myself)	
Avoid Women's Advice	317-332
Women's Counsel Is Cold ..	333-342
Avoid Lying And Vice	343-379
Worldly Wealth Perishes	381-409
Let Thy Words Be Few	410-426
Teach Thy Son to Obey	427-456
(End of Jesus MS with the words Expliciunt dicta Regis Aluredi.)	
(In the Trinity MS also the sections called the 'Fatherly Advice':	
Avoid Drunkenness	
Tell Not All Thy Thoughts	
Be Not Niggardly	
Be Liberal in Old Age	
Thank God for His Gifts	
My Son, Be Kind to All	
Avoid A Drunken Man	
Avoid A Deceitful Man	
Avoid A False Friend	
Avoid A Little Man	
Avoid A Red Man)	

Scholars have not been unanimous about the dating of *The Proverbs of Alfred*. Most scholars seem to agree, however, that the poem

should be dated somewhere around the thirteenth century. Moreover, there seems to have been an archetype to the text, an 'original' to all the MSS, composed in the twelfth century. The poem, according to Skeat (1907: xxxviii), should be placed somewhere between 1200 and 1250, whereas Borgström finds, with the help of other texts, that *The Proverbs of Alfred* cannot be as early dated as Skeat suggests and suggests the latter half of the thirteenth century. Arngart (1955: 55) argues that for the archetype of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, "[a] twelfth century date is to be assumed[.]" He (ibid.) refers to two scholars (Wells and Hall), who respectively place the time of composition at around 1150 and 1180 and sums up that "a date not too late in the twelfth century seems to be required for the original composition of the Proverbs." What makes the dating difficult is that there are no specific references in the text itself to the time of writing, and also because *The Proverbs of Alfred* is set in an earlier era than the time of its compilation, to the time of King Alfred's reign (9th Century).

Attributing a collection of wise sayings to a famous person has been a common practise throughout times. A Latin book used in many schools (and which was in use for centuries), the *Distichs of Cato*, was attributed "to the famously wise Roman statesman, Cato the Censor (234–149 BC), who almost certainly did not write them" (Cannon 2010: 416). Likewise, there are Biblical texts that are ascribed to someone perceived as 'wise', mainly to King Solomon (the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom and Ecclesiastes) and other old texts of the same type (for example Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)) (ibid.).

The Proverbs of Alfred refers repeatedly to words and actions as of equal value and the general tone in the whole collection of proverbs basically warns people (or rather, men, as it is quite overtly directed to the male gender) to govern their speech carefully (Rouse 2005: 27). Crépin, referring to the Anglo-Saxon social environment, comments that "[t]he general attitude is one of distrust, which is typical of a time of feuds [even] between close relatives" (1994: 49). According to the work, it is not advisable to tell all your thoughts to anyone - friend, foe or, for the purpose of this thesis, wife - because any (especially any excessive) information could be misused by others in the time of misfortune. One should also be wary and suspicious of the speech of others because people may for various reasons want to cheat or trick you (Rouse 2005: 28). Rouse, referring to the strophes about women, also notes that not

only words but other things in life may deceive a man (ibid.). An example of women deceiving men provided by Rouse (ibid.) is a stanza (ll. 306-307) that describes women with a metaphor stating for example that 'Many an apple is beautiful on the outside but rotten on the inside' (orig. "Mony appel is bryht wiþ-vte, and bitter wiþ-inne").

The text, described by Arngart (1942: 7) as "one of the earliest and more important specimens of Early Middle English", is known through four thirteenth-century manuscripts (Lutz 2002: 160), commonly known as the Trinity, Jesus, Cotton, and Maidstone manuscripts. All these MSS are written on vellum and are of different lengths. Some of the MSS contain different verses and sections and the same sections may occur in different order (Arngart 1942: 111-118). There are also differences in writing and spelling - the texts do not always correspond to each other word by word. In what follows, I will go over all four MSS and point out their most important features, beginning with the Cotton MS and Maidstone MS. I shall then present the Trinity MS and Jesus MS more extensively as they are of greater importance for this thesis. The Jesus MS is the one I shall be using as the basis of my study so it will be discussed last and the discussion will include more detailed information than that of the other MSS. The headings (1-4) contain first the commonly used name of the MS and then the shelf mark. In this thesis, I will be referring to the MSS with their commonly used names, i. e. the Cotton MS, Maidstone MS, Trinity MS and Jesus MS.

3.1 The Cotton Manuscript - MS Cotton Galba A. XIX

The most defective one of the manuscripts of *The Proverbs of Alfred* is the Cotton MS which was badly burned in a fire of the Cotton library in 1731. Only three leaves of it survive today (Arngart 1955: 11). It was believed to be completely lost until the fragments were found and published in 1936 (Arngart 1955:12). Fortunately, the manuscript had been also copied before the fire and it exists now in three transcriptions made by James, Spelman and Wanley (Arngart 1955: 11) and titled after them. The handwriting of the MS is the same in all the three surviving leaves (Arngart 1955: 12).

3.2 The Maidstone Manuscript – MS Maidstone Museum A. 13

The Maidstone MS, now in the Maidstone Museum in Kent, was only found in 1926 (Arngart 1955: 25). The manuscript contains many other texts besides *The Proverbs of Alfred* and is written by a “considerable number of hands” (ibid.). The other texts, Arngart (ibid.) continues, are “mainly in Latin but there are also a few short texts written in Anglo-Norman”. Apart from *The Proverbs of Alfred* there is only one text in Early Middle English called ‘*Long Life*’ and both these texts occur also in the Jesus MS (Arngart 1955: 26). The first three and the last six sections of *The Proverbs of Alfred* are left out in the Maidstone MS (Arngart 1955: 27). Furthermore (ibid.), the introductory phrase “So says Alfred” is always omitted. There are “deletions and alterations in the text, which indicate that the scribe was not quite familiar with the language of his original” (ibid.)

3.3 The Trinity Manuscript - MS Trinity College, Cambridge, B. 14. 39

The Trinity manuscript contains 43 texts in Early Middle English, Latin and Anglo-Norman and it is written by many hands, some of which reappear and some that do not (Arngart 1955: 31). The number of scribes may suggest that the manuscript was put together slowly during a long period of time (Arngart 1955: 32). Arngart (ibid.) suggests it may have been made in a religious house “whose members entered in it from time to time material they wished to preserve for their common use.”

In the Trinity MS, *The Proverbs of Alfred* “lacks a heading, but is introduced by a large blue initial, decorated with a tracery in red. [...] [and t]he text [...] is divided into lines and couplets by the alternate use of a dot and an inverted semicolon.” (Arngart 1955: 31). The text contains a number of scribal errors (ibid.; Skeat 1907: viii). As with the Cotton MS, also the Trinity MS was believed to have been lost, as it disappeared in 1863 (Arngart 1955: 32). It was, nevertheless, found thirty years later, in 1893, in a package sent to a former Fellow of the Trinity College (Arngart 1955: 32-33). The package was never opened until after his death when the manuscript was found again (ibid.).

The Trinity MS includes, added to the other MSS, a full second section ('Fatherly Advice', see page 9) of *The Proverbs of Alfred*. There has been critical debate over whether they occurred in the common original to all the manuscripts (Arngart 1942: 112) but on the basis of different metre (constant and regular rhyme) and a different vocabulary (much loan-words of Scandinavian and French origin against the "almost purely native" vocabulary of the authentic parts of the *Proverbs*), the second section seems to be a later addition (Arngart 1942: 114) and therefore unauthentic. The Trinity MS also includes sections in the first part of the *Proverbs* which the other MSS do not have (Arngart 1955: 49). According to Arngart (ibid.), despite the corrupt and poor state of the manuscript it is "of particular value, first as being the sole authority for a large proportion of the *Proverbs*, and secondly because despite much corruption it sometimes contains readings superior [to all the other MSS.]"

3.4 The Jesus Manuscript – MS Jesus College, Oxford, 29

The Jesus manuscript consists of two volumes, of which the second part contains 26 texts in Early Middle English, among them *The Proverbs of Alfred* (Arngart 1955: 25). The text precisely in this MS is "the latest of the extant versions" (Arngart 1942: 89). Following Arngart (1955: 35), "[t]he copy is carefully executed in a clear and legible hand, and there are few errors and practically no correction [in the text]." According to Arngart, the text of the Jesus MS is written in prose. All the line-ends are marked with a dot or a semicolon. The phrase "þus queþ Alvred" is not always in the beginning of a section but may have been placed at the end of the previous section (Arngart 1955: 36).

The Jesus MS differs from the other MSS in several details. It has, in the words of Arngart (1955: 135) "been considerably revised, and the changes undertaken affect (1) metrical form, (2) vocabulary, (3) contents, and (4) length and arrangement." On metrics, Arngart (ibid.) thinks that *The Proverbs of Alfred* has originally been written in a "late type of alliterative line characteristic of some early M[iddle] E[nglish] pieces" that was based on the rules of Old English alliterative poetry. Although the rules were still applied, *The Proverbs of Alfred* show "alliterative verse in an advanced state of decay as compared with classical Old English patterns." (Arngart 1942: 75). Arngart

(ibid.) states that “[a]ll the OE types of alliterating lines may be found in the Proverbs, but the number of irregular lines is great.” This holds true also for the other three manuscripts (ibid.). Arngart states, however, that the archetype of *The Proverbs of Alfred* has contained much more regular alliteration than the existing manuscripts.

The loss of alliteration holds true especially for the Jesus MS. According to Arngart (1942: 74), the scribe of the manuscript seems to be extremely “fond of rhyme”. Rhyme has also to some extent been used in the original, but the scribe of the Jesus MS has put it into much greater use, “frequently substituting rhymes for original alliteration, that is in replacing old metrical form by one more up to date” (1955: 135). In other words, the scribe, or ‘reviser’, as Arngart (1942: 76) calls him for making the various changes, has put in “a conscious effort [...] to replace the archaic alliterative line with a more up to date poetical form.” The scribe has also at various places altered the word-order, but Arngart concludes that this is due to achieving rhyme instead of the original alliteration and that the word-order of the whole text, apart from this objective in various lines, has been generally well retained (1955: 136).

The scribe of the Jesus MS has substituted obsolete or native words with current (often French-based) synonyms (ibid.) and “expands and paraphrases passages of the text, adding lines of pious and moral contents” (ibid.). Moreover, the scribe seems to have deleted sections from the Jesus MS that nevertheless occur in the other MSS. For example, as he, according to Arngart (1942: 114), seems to have been a religious man, “we might assume that he left out [a] section [...] which deals with the perils of intoxication, because he was shocked by its cynical realism.” However, Arngart thinks that similar motives for other deletions are hard to find and some of them may be accidental (Arngart 1942: 114; Arngart 1955: 54). On the whole, the omissions do nevertheless seem intentional (ibid.). Because of these reasons, Arngart (1955: 135) chooses to refer to the scribe as ‘reviser’. He, furthermore, briefly discusses the possible effect of oral recital on the Jesus MS stating that “[b]oth the omissions and the re-arrangement of material may to some extent be accounted for through the texts having been transmitted orally for some period of their history.” (Arngart 1955: 54). In a widely illiterate population, who nevertheless seems to have welcomed the poem with delight (Arngart 1955: 11,

Borgström 1908: xvii, Cannon 2010: 412), oral recital probably was the means for passing it on although no visible sign or record of that is given in the poem.

Despite the high extent of revision in the Jesus MS, Arngart (1955: 39) concludes it to be superior in many ways in comparison with the other MSS. He offers many examples on lines that are correctly preserved in the Jesus MS against all the other manuscripts on the basis of alliteration and spelling (Arngart 1955: 40-43). Furthermore, he demonstrates (1955: 43-49) how the Jesus MS agrees or disagrees with the other MSS in order to show that the other manuscripts seem more corrupt in terms of the contents than the Jesus MS, despite its revised state. Arngart (1955: 44). According to Arngart (ibid.) the Jesus MS “retains a considerable number of genuine readings” which in the other MSS have been corrupted or lost altogether. In addition (Arngart 1955: 44), the Jesus MS does not share even one corrupt variant with the other texts. This to Arngart (ibid.) suggests that the Jesus MS must have branched off the others at some point of descendency to the archetype. In other words, the Jesus MS represents another descent line to the Cotton, Maidstone and Trinity MS. Arngart (1942: 124, 1955: 47) presents the family tree of the MSS as follows (Diagram 1.):

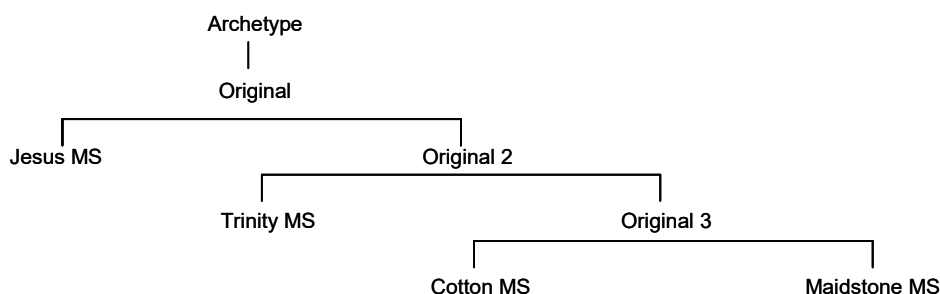


Diagram 1. The table of descent of *The Proverbs of Alfred* according to Arngart (1942: 124).

Considering that the Jesus MS represents a separate line of descent than the other MSS, Arngart (1955: 44) thinks that this is “the reason why the version of ‘A father’s advice to his son’ that was added to the Proverbs proper at some date subsequent to their original composition [...] is missing from J[esus MS]” and why the organisation of individual sections is different from that of the other MSS. In his words (1955: 49), “[i]t often stands alone in

preserving original readings lost from all the other texts, and its variants should be carefully weighed against those of [the other MSS].”

The fact that it, according to scholars, seems to be the most error-free manuscript of the four existing ones, I have chosen it as the sample text for my analysis and all excerpts in the analysis section (from page 27 onwards in this thesis) follow the text and markings of Skeat's 1907 edition of the text. Another edition by Borgstöm dates almost the same (1908) being only very slightly newer. Unlike Borgstöm's, however, Skeat's edition of 1907 can in its entirety be found scanned online (full web address provided in the list of references; see Figure 1 below for an example of the text) and thus the reader may, if desired, follow the poem from the original edition.

4 *KING ALFRED'S ADDRESS* [A. 17; C. 17]

Alured, he wes in Engle-lond,
 and king, wel swiþe strong.
 He wes king, and he wes clerk,
 wel he luuede Godes werk. 20
 He wes wis on his word,
 and war on his werke ;
 he wes þe wysuste mon
 þat wes Engle-londe on. 24

Figure 1. Lines 17-24 of *The Proverbs of Alfred* in the edition of Skeat (1907: 4).

4 DEFINING A PROVERB

For the introduction of a proverb, let us start with the Oxford English Dictionary's general definition: A *proverb* is “[a] short, traditional, and pithy saying; a concise sentence, typically metaphorical or alliterative in form, stating a general truth or piece of advice; an adage or maxim” (OED s.v. “proverb”, n.). To quote the etymological definition of the OED (ibid.), a “short well-known saying, moral maxim [...]”. In the plural, ‘*proverbs*’ refer to “Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures[.]”. The etymology of the Latin-derived (‘*proverbium*’) word is (ibid.) as follows: ‘*pro*’ - prefix + ‘*verbum*’ (=word) + ‘*ium*’ - suffix. [...] In other words, the sense of the word ‘proverb’ is ‘on behalf of (other)

words'; usually, explains Mieder, (1993: 25), something concise and pithy on behalf of more words and lengthier commentary."

Proverbs are an old phenomenon. Traditionally, proverbs have been used as advice and instruction as well as for moralising, that is to say, for didactic purposes. Proverbs carry wisdom that has been found adequate in certain situations, has come in handy at certain points in life, or seems to fit in the way the world works. Furthermore, proverbs affect discourse in various ways - they add colour to arguments, organise speech and sometimes also tell something about the speaker's intelligence and learned status. In the following, I shall briefly look at the characteristics of a proverb – a wider definition and their place in a language. After that I shall look at attitudes in proverbs. The topic refers back to the 'misogyny' defined above.

4.1 Characteristics of a Proverb

Offering a good comprehensive definition of the concept of a proverb is not easy. There seems to be, according to various scholars, no absolutely all-covering definition to be found. As the OED definition above lacks concrete limits as to how long it can be as well as examples, I offer another one to complement the OED. Mieder cites Whiting's definition (Whiting in Mieder 1993), which gives a wider perspective in understanding the term that covers such a wide range of sayings, whose boundaries are, nevertheless, quite vague.

A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth [...] in homely language, **often adorned**, however, **with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be.** Some proverbs have both literal and a figurative meaning [...] but more often they have but one of the two." (Whiting in Mieder 1993: 4, emphasis added)

Mieder (1993: 6) suggests that although we have a 'gut feeling' about the matter, there is a great difficulty of definition shows us as proverbs are somehow intangible and an abstract matter. Mieder (1993: 6) suggests that one of the problems in defining a proverb lies on the fact that proverbs should,

in peoples' mind, be somehow 'traditional'. Traditionality, he continues, is tricky to prove and it cannot be determined by a text itself.

Along with traditionality, there are many other factors to consider, for example lexicality and currency. Lexicality means the way and amount in which proverbs are stored to peoples' lexical knowledge, i.e. their language. As a part of the lexis, proverbs are mainly remembered as frozen entities and therefore always produced in the same words and word-order in a discourse (Fiedler 2007: 21). Fixed form allows the proverb to maintain memorability and recognisability in the actual use (Mieder 1993: 8). As we will see later, the sayings such as in *The Proverbs of Alfred* do feature more or less similar in other works of literature from the same era as well (Arngart 1955: 7-8). The amount of any (secular or religious) literature from its time was a small fraction compared to the amount of literature of today. Therefore, I suggest, the occurrence of these proverbs in many poems and works of the time testifies in favour of them being known in the language of Middle Ages.

Closely related to lexicality, we also have to be able to judge the currency (Fiedler (2007: 21) and Mieder (1993: 6), the 'current popularity' that a proverb should enjoy in order to be classified a proverb. What makes defining difficult, however, is that there are no precise limits as to what size of a group has to use a proverb and how much it should be used for it to be current (ibid.). Mieder (1993: 6) suggests that we should rather talk about relative currency and that we normally have an insight telling us if the proverb is 'current' in the language we speak. It is important to keep in mind, nevertheless, that not all members of society speak a language the same way – old and young people, for example, use different words and sometimes different sayings, and the style of business language is normally different to the one people use at home. Basically, common general knowledge allows us to judge the currency of proverbs in our own language and in our personal 'culture' (Mieder 1993: 136).

4.2 Attitudes in proverbs

There are proverbs for all aspects of life, and also for example about friends, men, women, choosing a life partner, marriage and raising children. But the great majority of proverbs about women is appalling. Lucas (1965: 45-46) is

astonished by the unfairness and hostility of proverbs concerning women, that is, misogynous proverbs. The attitude is something that seems to come up especially in old proverbial sayings. One of the reasons for proverbs like these is, in Lucas's opinion, the fact that proverbs seldom - if almost ever - were composed by women (Lucas 1965: 45). Lucas's examples (1965: 46) of misogynous proverbs include: "To educate a woman is putting a knife in the hand of a monkey." (Hindi), "Would you have tough shoes, sole them with a woman's tongue." (Alsatian), "Never trust a woman, not though she has borne you seven children." (Japan) and "Lord, there are so many nasty things in the world and Thou hast created wives!" (Russian). Lucas describes the inventors of many proverbs to be old grumpy men, "frequently cynical, [...] largely misogynists" (Lucas 1965: 49). The same opinions are shared by Mieder (1993: 65), who further discredits men who have invented such proverbs by stating that the fact that the women in their own lives have probably been very good to them adds even an extra insult to the offence. Similar examples to those of Lucas's (above) that Mieder (1993: 65) provides from past centuries include "A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail", "A woman's answer is never to seek", "Women naturally deceive, weep and spin" and "Women are necessarily evils".

Mieder (1993: 65) proposes that "proverbs contain the value system of the time of their origin". As stated above in the examples from Lucas, many proverbs were coined before the time of feminism (and indeed, most of them by men) and at the time when the social status of women was relatively low. The most antifeministic examples of woman and her place are from the sixteenth century (Mieder 1993: 66), such as "A good woman must be beaten" (ibid.) and "A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree, the more they're beaten, the better they be". In the aforementioned proverb a woman and a tree do seem, in the speaker's opinion, to need the same kind of handling as if they could in some ways be compared (in terms of 'productivity', perhaps). Incidentally, according to some scholars (Borgström 1908: 58-59, 95; Skeat 1907: 61), there is a similar idea even in one of *The Proverbs of Alfred* (ll. 290-5; see page 35-39 of this thesis) suggesting that as fruit-tree branches should be bent for achieving a strong trunk and easier harvest, so should a woman be kept busy (in a way 'bent' as a tree) in household chores in order to keep her obedient and well-behaved. I shall return to this aspect later in the text.

Although nowadays clearly inappropriate, the abovementioned proverbs, or at least the misogynous attitudes they carry, are nevertheless still known to the modern public. Mieder (1993: 65) states that “[a]lmost every proverb that touches on women contains a severe negation of the value of women in society.” Fortunately, one could add, a share of antifeministic proverbs nowadays has contradictory sayings to oppose them. Examples provided by Mieder (1993: 70-71) are “A woman’s place is in the House... and in the Senate!” (a counter to “A woman’s place is in the home”) and “The best man for the job ... may be a woman” (emphasising the fact that the phrasing “best *man* for the job” is normally used without thinking the gender bias). The amount is nevertheless very scarce and it will take most probably a very long time to repair the damage misogynous proverbs have done to the social value of and the attitudes towards a woman and their alleged low morale and lack of sophisticated behaviour (Mieder 1993: 71). Moreover, the counters do not offer a ‘wisdom’ themselves but, I feel, often seem to carry some kind of ‘marketing value’, be that advertising or a sign of benevolence. I find that they are a way for the utterer to show respect and honour, or perhaps compassion, towards the discriminated group and furthermore, they can be used as an appeal for social, commercial or political business. They are, as such, not a direct turn-around in proverbial ‘mindset’.

5 DEFINING A ‘PROVERB OF ALFRED’

Above I have given a short description of how proverbs can be defined and discussed their attitudes to women. Next, I will shift the focus from traditional proverbs into the kinds of proverbial sayings I am studying in this thesis. This section will be divided into two subsections – wisdom literature and didactic poetry – that deal with the literary genre that *The Proverbs of Alfred* represents, as a collection of proverbial maxims and recommendations on various subjects. Let us start with the term *maxim*, as rather than proverbs in the traditional sense, *The Proverbs of Alfred* fall into the category of maxims and are what one could call ‘ideas similar to proverbs’. Mieder and Holmes (2000: 9) offer a definition for the term: “A maxim is a concise formulation of some fundamental

principle or rule of conduct.” They serve as a moral guideline and are often compact and easy to memorise (ibid.)

The Proverbs of Alfred contain much more words than is traditional for proverbs and the sections are far too long to be classified only proverbial. In essence, *The Proverbs of Alfred*, containing maxims and recommendations, belongs to a part of a traditional Old English genre called didactic and instructive poetry, falling into the category of a ‘gnomic verse’. In the words of Arngart (1955: 1), “*The Proverbs of Alfred* is a piece of didactic writing containing precepts of morality and rules of conduct rather than a collection of proverbs in the ordinary sense of the word.” All the mentioned genres, maxim, didactic poetry and gnomic verse, can be placed under an umbrella term, a genre called wisdom literature. In the following, shall be discussing the term ‘wisdom literature’ in more detail, describing what it is and with what means it is composed. After that, I shall be looking at didactic poetry more closely.

5.1 Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature is a genre label most often applied to Biblical texts, especially in reference to the *Book of Proverbs*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* (Weeks 2010: 1), but the term is extended to secular literature as well. Also for example in Old English, following Hill (2005: 166), “[t]here [...] existed [...] a native Germanic tradition of sapiential literature”. *The Book of Proverbs*, following Weeks (2010: 1), is an “anthology of various materials, mostly offering advice either through long collections of short sayings, or through more elaborate units of teaching”. According to him, all three – *The Book of Proverbs*, *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* – “focus on issues that are relevant to all humans, ranging from good manners through to the purpose of living”. They are, moreover, interested in the individual more than in any certain group of people, and give advice that is focused on the present rather than the future (ibid.). Even if *The Proverbs of Alfred* cannot be regarded as an Old English text, given the date of composition (the twelfth century, whereas the period of Old English was around the fifth to the eleventh century), it follows the same style and poetical pattern. According to Hill (2005: 179), Old English wisdom poetry “directly addresses the problems of moral values and human choice”. The subjects *The Proverbs of Alfred* deal

with vary from good manners to more specific decisions that one has to make in life, and in this case, the weight is much more on the long “elaborate units of teaching” that Weeks (2010: 1) mentions than it is on traditional proverbs.

Weeks suggests that, for practical purposes, ‘wisdom literature’ should be understood in the first place as literature about wisdom and not as an “origin or [a] standpoint, just as, say, ‘crime fiction’ is literature *about* crime, not a literature composed to promote crime, or written by criminals.” (2010: 1). Also ‘*The Proverbs of Alfred* is essentially poetry about wisdom more than it is poetry composed to directly ‘push for’ wisdom. In reference to wisdom literature, Weeks (2010: 2) also discusses different types of skill and ability. He concludes that what normally is understood as specifically ‘wisdom’ in the sense of wisdom literature refers to people’s “‘know-how’ of living their life” and continues that “[t]o achieve it, of course, is to live better, which is to say, longer and more successfully” (2010: 2). Wisdom, furthermore, often seems to be connected to righteousness (ibid.) thus giving it a religious nuance; if, following Weeks (2010: 2-3), “one believes that long life and prosperity are a reward from God, then wisdom becomes associated with pleasing God - that is, the skill lies not so much in understanding life itself as in discerning the divine will.”

In wisdom literature, there is rather inevitably a need for someone who is accepted to be ‘wise’ and thus qualified to teach wisdom to others. In Weeks’s opinion, this suggests that the world does not consist of people with various degrees of wisdom but it is filled “with those who are wise and those who are not” (2010: 3). If it is taken for granted that wisdom is not shared by all but that it can be learnt, Weeks finds it naturally follows that there comes up the question of who is able to teach it (ibid.). Teaching others wisdom calls for a reputation of being a wise person. Weeks (2010: 3) writes:

If somebody claims that they can provide the key, or part of the key, to a long and successful life, it is reasonable to examine their credentials. Where the offer of teaching is made [only] through written literature, moreover, which can present no author directly for interrogation and evaluation, then this literature has to find a way of accrediting itself in the eyes of its audience. (Weeks 2010: 3)

The point of ‘*wisdomhood*’ or ‘*wiseness*’, so to speak, is frequently emphasised in writings about King Alfred, including *The Proverbs of Alfred*,

where already in the first strophe he is stated to be the wisest man in England (for example Skeat 1907: 4; lines 19-24; my translation). Also, King Alfred was very religious (in the words of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, he was 'a king and a cleric' and respected God) and there is a religious nuance to be found in many of the 'proverbs'. In the last lines of the first strophe of *The Proverbs of Alfred* there is a straightforward portrayal of Alfred himself. There he is stated to be a king and a cleric, most probably suggesting that he was gifted and able to guide and advice people in both worldly and spiritual matters (Rouse 2005: 20). In Skeat's edition (1907: 4; lines 19-24) Alfred "loved God's work, was wise on his word and wary (meaning here 'prudent or 'considerate') in his actions" and finally "he was the wisest man that there was in England" [my translations]. Rouse (2005: 20-21) sums up that all these personal properties establish King Alfred as a good instructor, someone, who is worth listening to and whose words are worth adhering to.

The religious message of the sayings in the poem and, for instance, the occasional references to the Book of Proverbs, provide *The Proverbs of Alfred* with even more authority when not only King Alfred as a wise speaker, but through his citing also divine authorities seem to recommend the manners and behaviour presented in the text. In other words, his name carried a great authority that seemed to be a suitable means for offering people advice and recommendations that were hoped to be followed. In addition, the poem accredits itself by referring to what is defined appropriate behaviour not only by King Alfred but also by the Bible.

5.2 Didactic Poetry

As we have now established that for dispensing wisdom there has to be someone wise and how 'wiseness' can be defined, let us now consider the overall dispensing method, the concept of didactic poetry. According to Morey (2005: 183), "didactic verse is the largest single body of Middle English poetry". Depending on the broadness of definition of 'didacticism', he continues, one could even claim that almost all Middle English literature had teaching and instruction as its aim, or at the least state, that didacticism was an underlying feature of various of the writings of that time (ibid.). Also, Morey states, even

illiterate laymen would have recognised the didactic aim at least through oral citing (2005: 183; see page 14-15 as well as section 7 of this thesis). Didactic poetry, says Morey (ibid.) “offers wisdom and comfort: the wisdom to lead a Christian life, and the comfort of knowing that salvation accrues from so living”. This aspect, as already mentioned, is clearly present in *The Proverbs of Alfred* with its maxims on how to live a good life and how to behave in a proper, acceptable and friendly manner. Furthermore, there is always a teaching in all Alfred’s proverbs, involving consequences should the recommendation not be observed. Instruction, reasoning, conclusion and consequences are present in the section to be analysed (ll. 247-342) but they occur in all other sections of the work as well.

Now, to add to *what* didactic poetry tries to achieve, let us discuss *how* it may try to achieve something. Dalzell (1996: 7), marks that there is always an interaction between the reader and author, pupil and teacher, and speaker and audience. Didactic poetry involves a teacher who directs his or her speech to an audience (ibid.), be that for example pupils or readers. *The Proverbs of Alfred* not only creates a link between the text and the reader, but even inside the text there is a frame story about a speaker and his audience and thus another link in which the reader can relate. If (referring to the discussion in the above section 4.1) it is accepted that wisdom can be taught, the overall concept of didactic poetry also seems legitimate and justified (Dalzell 1996: 11). In essence, didactic poetry both teaches and advises the reader in a certain matter and warns against the consequences should the reader not comply with the advice (Matsuda 1997: 34). *The Proverbs of Alfred* is a good example of this. It contains, as mentioned, different sections which together create a whole but also all individual sections create an entity of their own. Cannon (2010: 417) specifies this kind of ‘proverb’ to comprise “proof, contrast, comparison and judgement” [my summary]. He continues that as the sections of *The Proverbs of Alfred* seem to fulfil the requirements, each of them can be classified as a ‘progymnasma proverb’ (ibid.). The ‘progymnasma proverb’ equals to “a set of basic exercises used for teaching reading and writing from ancient times, the so-called progymnasmata (‘elementary exercises’)” (Cannon 2010: 416). Cannon finds, overall, that there is a ‘proverbial kernel’ (2010: 414) in each section of *The Proverbs of Alfred*.

Within some individual 'proverbs' of Alfred, there is a *real* proverb (such as "cold red is quene red" [cold advice is a woman's advice], (page 48 in this thesis). The real proverbs that function somewhat like a topic kernel may be situated anywhere in a stanza – beginning, middle or end – inside an ample and ornate account (Cannon 2010: 414). The account "proceeds without any obvious system [...], but, through a variety of illustrations, comparisons, and exemplifications, each stanza tries to demonstrate the generality of the cited proverb's wisdom" (Cannon 2010: 414). This all functions persuasively towards the reader. Significantly, the 'proverbs' (or perhaps, rather, recommendations) of Alfred are not direct orders or commands to the reader from a high authority but, rather, recommendations with arguments and explanations of various kinds on why they should be followed. King Alfred was already known for this kind of style of writing when *The Proverbs of Alfred* was first written, for example through his translation of *Pastoral Care*. According to Discenza (2005: 129), Alfred "refrains from outright commands, instead simultaneously urging and praising his readers." This feature makes the proverbs more 'agreeable' and persuades the reader to follow them. In short, following the suggested ways of behaviour presented in the Proverbs, basically, the Christian way of life, leads towards happiness and respectability, and from that it follows in turn that life will eventually end in salvation.

According to Sternbach (1974: 44), "gnomic and didactic poems are collections of verses composed by one author only". He suggests, nevertheless, that in practise there are works that are *considered to be written* by one author, but which may in fact be collections of verse by many different authors and also drawing from oral tradition. The reason they were ascribed to a single author is, in Sternbach's words, "in majorem gloriam", i. e. 'for greater glory' (Sternbach 1974: 44). According to his statement, I find it possible that also *The Proverbs of Alfred* may be a collection of didactic sayings and recited folk poetry from many people, which ostensibly is uttered by one person. The effect is made easier with the help of one scribe only, which to the reader would indicate that the original was composed by one writer (who apparently has followed a speech of King Alfred). All the 'proverbs' in the sections are attributed directly to the king although the warnings etc. can be citations of another wisdom (e.g. (line 317) "So says Alfred:" → (line 329) "Even Solomon has said...") It is very probable,

though, that rather than completely new proverbs and utterances by King Alfred, the poem contains many proverbial sayings that were common among people during the time of writing, and possibly also borrows proverbial sayings from other contemporary works. There is for example a connection to similar sayings in the abovementioned *The Owl and the Nightingale* and in a poem called the *Proverbs of Hendyng* (Arngart 1955: 7-8). Even though the proverbs do not exactly match (ibid.), to me this connection indicates that the sayings in one form or another have been familiar to the public and have circulated at least in the literate parts of the society. On the basis of oral citing being familiar and common (Morey 2005: 83, Arngart 1955: 54), I find that they have possibly circulated within *all* parts of the society.

6 ANALYSIS – LINES 247-342 OF THE PROVERBS OF ALFRED (SKEAT'S EDITION OF 1907)

After discussing the type of 'proverbs' found in *The Proverbs of Alfred*, it is now time to look at the text of the poem. As discussed above, according to Arngart (1955: 5) and in reference to the wisdom literature genre, "many points of resemblance to the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament allow us to draw parallel between our text and the Proverbs ascribed to Solomon, and to suggest that these may have furnished the model for our collection." (ibid.). As I have noted, also the titling of the poem may be considered to follow the same Biblical style.

The length of the whole poem extends up to 709 lines, the Trinity MS being the longest and out of the entity, I have chosen 95 lines, numbered 247-342 in Skeat's Jesus MS edition. In the following I use Skeat's 1907's transcription of the text and also his line markings found in the 1907 edition, which is to be found online (see the references of this thesis). The linguistic and social aspects in *The Proverbs of Alfred*, ll. 247-342 are dealt with in the sections below, offering commentary to a limited number of lines at a time. The reason for this is that it seems more suitable for the context to discuss the linguistic and social aspects at once in the running text in connection to the specific lines commented, rather than write on those aspects in different sections, which would lead to the formation of a relatively random selection of

various kinds of short discussions. Furthermore, another reason for giving the commentary on linguistic and social aspects for a selected number of lines at a time is to avoid the reader's need to browse the text back and forth when referring to the lines of the poem, which would happen, should the ll. 247-342 be quoted only once in its entirety and all the linguistic commentary offered in the several pages following that. Before discussing the abovementioned aspects, I shall first introduce the lines that are to be analysed at the time and after that a transcription into Present-Day English. This is done in order to allow the reader to follow the poem's text. Then, on the basis of Skeat's (1907) and Borgström's (1908) studies, I will offer definitions and explanations for linguistic aspects – word choice, possible scribal interference etc. – in the text. After addressing the linguistic details, I will discuss the chosen lines from the social perspective, focusing on the social status of women in the Anglo-Saxon era (i. e. the time that the poem covers).

6.1 Lines 247-257 (Choose No Evil Wife; as named by Skeat 1907)

A. 15.

Pus queþ Alured:	
'Ne schal-tu neuere þi wif	248
by hire wlyte cheose,	
for neuer none þinge	
þat heo to þe brungeþ.	
Ac leorne hire custe,	252
heo cuþeþ hi wel sone.	
For mony mon for ayhte	
vuele i-auhteþ;	
and ofte mon of fayre	256
frakele icheoseþ.	

A rough translation of the ll. 247-257, resulting from the aim of retaining word order and the relatively rigorous use of glossaries provided by Skeat (1907) and Borgström (1908) goes as the following:

So says Alfred:
 "Never shall you choose your wife
 by her beauty
 nor for any thing
 she will bring to thee.
 But learn her ways,

she will show them very soon.
For many a man for wealth
makes a poor choice
and often a man, choosing a fair woman,
chooses a rotten one.

The lines 247-257 begin the sections which consider the choice of a good wife. The lines start with a sentence that is used throughout *The Proverbs of Alfred*: "Þus queþ Alured" meaning "So says Alfred". Line 248 contains the word 'wif', which in the text stands for 'wife'. The Old English words 'hire' (line 249, 252) and 'heo' (251, 253) stand for 'her' and 'she'. It is advised, in the lines 248-51, that one - or directly put, 'you' - should never choose your wife by her looks (= 'wlyte) or for anything she will bring to you.

Here I find that the scribe is referring to dowry, and another possible source of property besides dowry would be any personal wealth a woman, mainly a widow (by heritage), may possess. At first thought then, based on the poem's message, it may seem presumable that any wealth of a woman was truly passed on to her husband in marriage. However, scholars are unanimous about the fact (Mumby 2012: 159). Women were, for example, gifted with some property after marriage. There existed a tradition of 'morning gift', that was a property granted for the new wife on the morning following a wedding (Jewell 1996: 27, 29). It could have been land, jewellery, money or for example even sheep and it was for the woman to keep and use as she wished throughout the marriage (Jewell 1996: 29). It is not, then, entirely the case that only the man 'gains' something in marriage and the woman 'brings' with her objects of value, but also the woman gains something concrete. Followingly, in the reality of the Middle Ages, a woman was not a mere thing of increasing the man's property but an alliance in which something was gained and something given.

The other MSS, against the text in the Jesus MS, include the word 'bury' meaning 'house' (Trinity MS: Ne for non ahte / to þine bury bringen), stating that one should not bring the bride to one's *home* for the sake of property (Arngart 1955: 169). The sense, and the alliteration between bury and bringen, is lost in the Jesus MS and the variant, according to Arngart (ibid.) is thus inferior. Also, in the Jesus MS, the word 'þinge' (line 250) replaces the word 'ehte' or 'ayhte'

of the other MSS (Arngart 1955: 170) and the wording and sense of the following line is altered accordingly to form a rhymed couplet (“for neuer none Pinge / Þat heo to þe brungeþ”) (Arngart 1942: 81). A direct translation into Modern English would be, as demonstrated above, ‘or for any things / that she brings to you’.

The following sentence starting with ‘Ac’ (= ‘but’) urges the man to learn the manners of the potential bride before making the decision and it is also stated that it will not take long for the woman to show her true self. In the words of Skeat (1907: 60) the sentence translates as, “[b]ut learn her virtues; she will show them very soon”. Borgström (1908: 56) offers a more detailed explanation of the request. For ‘custe’ he uses ‘qualities’ (whereas Skeat used ‘virtues’) and for the last lines he offers an elaborate translation:

“[N]or [shalt thou] for any property to bring her to thy home, before thou hast learnt to know her qualities (character)’ [...] ‘For many a man hastens badly for the sake of property (i.e. acts badly in his ardent desire for property) and often a man chooses a wretched woman in a faire one’.” (Borgström 1908: 56).

Above I have made use of Borgström’s notes on the Trinity MS, hence the occurrence of the words ‘to thy home’ (c.f. Jesus MS lacking the word ‘bury’). In the quotation occurs also the word ‘hastens’. Arngart (1955: 170) comments that in that line number 255 in the Trinity MS there is a spelling error, and the correct present English wording is ‘to estimate’ or ‘to calculate’. To these last lines Skeat (1907: 60) offers “For many a man for wealth’s sake reckons amiss” and “And often a man, of a fair one [i.e. woman; my addition], chooses a base one.” The word ‘base’ translates in Modern English as “low in the social scale; not noble, low-born” (*OED* s.v. “base”, adj.). In addition, Arngart (1955: 170) states that although ‘frakele’, according to *OED* means ‘dangerous’ or ‘deceitful’ (*OED* s.v. “frakel”, adj.), its meaning, when contrasted with ‘faire’ shifts into ‘vile’ or just ‘bad’. The general idea of the lines is that the beauty and the property of a woman may deceive a man to make a wrong choice in choosing a life partner.

Christianity prevailed in the United Kingdom during the composing of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, and there are for example many references to God in the text. Not only were the clerics able to guide one on the troubles of life, according to Jewell (1996: 18), churchmen defined among other things also

how the female gender should behave. She (ibid.) continues that “[m]oderation, modesty and patience [and, I add, chastity] were feminine virtues.” There are certain passages in the Bible portraying for example a virtuous woman (Proverbs 31:10-31) which also function as grounds for the abovementioned 'definitions' made by clerics. Based on the poem's text it seems that medieval English society seems to have expected women to be passive, or perhaps even submissive.

According to Jewell, to support the view that women were supposed to act in a modest fashion, we only have the proof of literal sources that were in almost entirely written by men (1996: 15-18). Women in the medieval times were not able, also simply because wide illiteracy, to write down texts on their own times, and the situation was even more so when it came down to influencing contemporary religious or political circles with literary means (Jewell 1996: 15). Women had little say about the texts that described the organisation of the society, traditions, behaviour in general and also the accepted norms of behaviour (ibid.). Jewell continues that as they were not able to participate in the creation of literary work that formed and described the essentials of the contemporary society, they were, followingly, not able to record their feelings and opinions on what was expected, and in some cases, demanded from them (1996: 15-16). The found opinions and records of the Anglo-Saxon society are not those of women and we also cannot in the absolute define the extent of the abovementioned expectations and the realisation of them in the genuine medieval everyday (Jewell 1996: 18). In short, Jewell sums up, that the picture of women's place in the society of Middle Ages is one that we cannot recreate by texts made by women; although women's voices from the era are heard if they are found, “the woman's point of view” most often just does not exist (Jewell 1996: 15-16).

6.2 Lines 258-267 (Choose No Evil Wife; as named by Skeat 1907)

Wo is him þat vuel wif
bryngeþ to his cotlyf!
So him is alyue 260
þat vuele ywyueþ.
For he schal vppon eorþe
dreori i-wurþe.
Monymon singeþ 264
þat wif hom bryngeþ;
wiste he hwat he brouhte,
wepen he myhte.'

Below is a rough translation of the ll. 258-267. Also this time, the lack of aesthetics is the result from the aim of retaining word order as well as precise glossary use.

Woe is him that an evil wife
brings to his humble life
So is to him in life
that evil marries
For he shall, upon earth
become dreary.
Many a man sings
who a wife to home brings
If he had known what he brought
To weep he might.

The lines 258-67 (above) contain elements of end rhyme. The two first lines rhyme with 'wif' / 'cotlyf'. Furthermore, the lines 262-3 rhyme with 'eorþe' / 'i-wurþe' and the lines 264-5 with 'singeþ' / 'bryngeþ'. Of the line 262, Arngart (1942: 81) states that the form 'uppon eorþe', "a tag of which the J[esus MS] reviser was fond", is hardly the original form and is used (against the wording of the other MSS) to form a rhyme (ibid.). As stated, rhyme is a feature in poetry that partly started, as a more modern style, to replace alliteration (Arngart 1955: 135) around the time when the MSS of *The Proverbs of Alfred* were written (at the turn of Old English into Early Modern English). As rhyme was common and also popular in the fourteenth century (seen for example in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*), I assume that the scribe of the Jesus MS may have tried to gain popularity to the text by revising it in considerable amounts (Arngart 1955:

135) and putting work to creating rhyme instead of using the alliteration which is thought to have been the original method (ibid.). This might speak in favour of the text being a piece of entertainment, rather than a piece of serious advice and norms, as suggested by Cannon (2010: 415-416).

The lines 260-3 are translated by Borgström as “So it is in life for him who marries badly, for she will often make him sorrowful” (1908: 56). Skeat (1907: xlv) notes with a quote from Zupitza that there has been found a German text (translation below) corresponding to the lines 264-7 in 1575:

“Mennich man lude syngeth,
Wenn men em de brut bringet :
Weste he, wat men em brochte,
Dat he wol wenen mochte.” [punctuation as in the original]

“Many a man full loudly sings
When his bride he homeward brings
Wist he, what he home had led,
He well might weep and wail instead.” (Skeat 1907: xlv)

Skeat (1907: xlv) and Arngart (1942: 88; 1955: 170) moreover, note that also these lines, as well as the passage in the previous section of the thesis (6.1), occur in a slightly different layout and form in the abovementioned *Proverbs of Hendyng* and thus seem to be borrowed in either one (Arngart 1942: 88).

The position of a man in the Middle Ages seems, in the light of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, to be quite independent and seem to have been able to make choices for themselves. Considering women and their lives in the early Middle Ages, women basically had two options: to get married or to become a nun. There was a need to have someone to maintain one, be it a monastery or a husband. Becoming a nun meant for example a possibility of gaining a degree of literacy (Mate 1999: 26), an advantage that was not available for many at that time, but restraining life in other ways. It is important to note, however, that also being a nun meant being in the ‘management’ of a higher authority - if wives were to be, according for instance to Rouse (2005: 29) and to *The Proverbs of Alfred* as well, managed by their husbands, so, I argue, were nuns to be managed by the abbesses, who were in turn managed by a higher ecclesiastic authority.

To the majority of women, marriage was the means of being maintained and cared for and it was expected to last. Both in the Anglo-Saxon times and after the Norman conquest, divorce has been a complex issue in Great Britain (Emery 2013: 677; *Cultural Sociology of Divorce: An Encyclopedia*: s.v. "Law: United Kingdom"). Marriages were mostly seen as unbreakable sacraments (ibid.) and the option of divorce was legally almost non-existent (Emery 2013: 677). Marrying concerns not only the couple but also their relatives. As the Middle Ages was a time for feuds (Crépin 1994: 49), there must have been even a great pressure for the married couple to stay together in order to maintain peace between families. There, nevertheless, was an option of separation and should that have happened, it seems that Anglo-Saxon women were relatively fortunate (Emery 2013: 677). They had for example a right to the children and some part of the marital property (ibid.). In the case of divorce and possible remarrying, however, the options were very limited while the former spouse still lived (Emery 2013: 677).

6.3 Lines 268-284 (Choose No Evil Wife; as named by Skeat 1907)

A. 16.

Pus queþ Alured:	268
'Ne wurþ þu neuer so wod,	
ne so wyn-drunke,	
þat éuere segge þine wife	
alle þine wille.	272
For if [heo] iseye þe bi-vore	
þine i-vo alle,	
and þu hi myd worde	
i-wreþþed heuedest,	276
ne schulde heo hit lete,	
for þing lyuyinde,	
þat heo ne scholde þe forþ vp-breyde	
of þine baleu-syþes!	280
Wymmon is word-wod,	
and haueþ tunge to swift;	
þeyh heo wel wolde,	
ne may heo hi nowiht welde.'	284

A rough translation is as follows:

So says Alfred:
 'Never be so mad

or so wine-drunken,
to ever tell your wife
all your thoughts.
For if she saw you before
all thy foes
and you had angered her
with words
she would never stop
for any living thing
that she should not upbraid thee continually
for your times of misfortunes
Woman is unrestrained in speech
and has a tongue too swift;
although she wished to,
she can in no way control it.

As with others, also this section starts with "So says Alfred". Besides a preface, it may, in addition, have another function in a text. As the opinions considering women in the poem are relatively misogynous, it may be that the scribe, although anonymous, does not want to take a full responsibility for the attitudes that seem to have been prevalent at those times. The way of attributing discourse to someone is sometimes used as a means for the scribe to distance himself from the actual ideas presented in the work, as explained by Fiedler (2007: 87-88). She states that sometimes "writers [may] have the feeling that their use of [proverbs] [...] is not appropriate for a text or speech[.] Since they want to dissociate themselves from their own language use to a certain degree, their [text is] [...] often accompanied by expressions such as *as the saying goes, as they say[.]*" (ibid.).

The lines 268-284 consider the sharp tongue of a woman and as a result, the need for men to limit the amount of thoughts they share with their wife. As Skeat (1910: 18) puts it, the first lines (269-72) of the section read: "Never be so mad" [or so wine-drunken] "as ever to tell" [thy wife all thy desire]. In his edition of 1907, Skeat explains the lines 273-84 in a relatively detailed way although at the same time he also tries to retain some poetical aspects in his explanatory section. For these lines, he offers the following comments:

For if she saw all thy foes before thee and thou hadst made her wrath by a word, she would never desist (lit. let it go), for any living thing, (so) that she would not upbraid thee continually for thy times of adversity. Woman is

word-mad, and has a tongue too swift; though she might well wish it, she can in no way control it. (Skeat 1907: 61)

Borgström, on the other hand, is more straightforward. Of the ll. 277-80 (“ne schulde heo hit lete / for þing lyuyinde / þat heo ne scholde ðe forþ vp-breyde / of þine baleu-syðes!”) he translates “[s]he would not for any living thing give up upbraiding thee for thy misfortunes” (1908: 56). Of ll. 283-4 Arngart (1955: 171) states that the Jesus MS here retains the correct form ‘hi’ in reference to ‘tunge’, which is a feminine word. For ‘word-mad’, the *Middle English Dictionary online* (s.v. “wōrd” (n.) → “~wode”) provides the explanation unrestrained, i. e. not controlled, in speech. As can be seen, some attitudes in *The Proverbs of Alfred* are visible also in the present. Even today a common topic of joking is the presumption that women speak very much and get easily angry for small reasons. Examples and my translations of Finnish: “naiset kälättää/juoruaa” [women talk/gossip a lot], “paha/hankala akka” [lousy hag]. They largely prevail even though the contrasting sayings as well (Mieder 1993: 70-71; see page 20 of this thesis) that try to repair the damage of the old sayings and views they have created.

As stated, Mieder (1993: 65) suggested that “proverbs contain the value system of the time of their origin”. I, however, slightly disagree with Mieder (ibid.) in that even if there may not have been counters to the misogynous proverbs of the Middle Ages, even *The Proverbs of Alfred* (contrary to the message of the lines 247-338) shortly on the last four lines judge that there can also be good women. Women were things to be managed by fathers and husbands (Mate 1999: 99-100; Rouse 2005: 29) but not mere subjects. They seem to have had, as mentioned above, rights to their property and children and the possibility to separate from their husbands (Emery 2013: 677; Jewell 1996: 29) and were, followingly, recognized in the society.

6.4 Lines 285-295 (Keep Thy Wife Busy; as named by Skeat 1907)

A. 17.

þus queð Alfred:

'Idelschipe and ouer-prute,

þat lereð yong wif vuele þewes;

and ofte þat [heo] wolde 288

do þat heo ne scholde;
þene vnþev lihte
leten heo myhte,
if heo ofte a swóte 292
for-swunke were;
þeyh hit is vuel to buwe
þat beo nule treowe.

A rough translation of the lines goes as follows:

“So says Alfred:
‘Idleness and excessive pride
which teach a young wife evil habits;
that she often would
do what she should not;
those evil habits
she might easily let go
if she often with sweat
worn out with toil were
though it is difficult to control
that which will not be faithful

On line 287, the Jesus MS scribe has changed an original word ‘leþere’ (= bad) into a more modern ‘vuele’ (=evil) (Arngart 1942: 93). Here an authentic alliteration is spoiled, as ‘leþere’ would have alliterated with ‘lereþ’ (ibid.). On line 288, the scribe has substituted ‘wolde’ for ‘þencen’ (= ‘to intend’, ‘to have in mind’ Arngart 1955: 176), found in the Trinity and Maidstone MS), which probably also would have been authentic (Arngart 1942: 82). With the change, he has created a “feeble rhyme” (ibid.) but has at the same time also spoiled the grammar of the lines. In my opinion the “feeble rhyme”, however, testifies in favour of the scribes aim to target the text for a wide audience. It seems reasonable that with all the effort put into copying an original text into a manuscript slowly by hand, one surely wanted the manuscript to please the public and have a function, be that for example entertainment or teaching. I find it would have been only practical to modernize the text even ever so slightly along with the tedious task of copying, for this may lead to the continuous popularity of the text and thus justify the making of the copy. Based on these ideas, I argue that if the scribe saw it fit and purposeful to modernise the text to please the audience, the text, then, should be seen as entertainment and not as a set of compulsory rules (Rouse 2010: 415-416). Entertainment does not

exclude the fact that *The Proverbs of Alfred* may have been a schoolbook (ibid.), but to me it suggests that the target audience may have been wider and this could also be a text aimed for example for oral citing in public happenings.

Lines 290-3 in the Jesus MS (*Þene vnÞev lihte / leten heo myhte*, if heo ofte a swóte / for-swunke were) are “two original, alliterating couplets.” (Arngart 1955: 176). For the last six lines (290-5) Skeat (1907: 61) offers the following translation: “That light misdemeanour she might give up, if she were often overtoiled in sweat; though it is difficult to bend that which does not wish to be true”. For this section, Borgström (1908: 58-59) comments on the text of the Trinity MS and offers the following explanation: “If, tired with work, she were in sweat, she would not think so, i.e. to do what she should not”. It has to be noted, that even though the idea of both texts is exactly the same, the Trinity MS lacks lines 290-1 of Jesus MS (*Þene vnÞev lihte / leten heo myhte*) and replaces them with a more general statement. Of this section in general, Borgström states that the last two lines (294-5) are hard to explain and comment on but supposes that they refer to some other proverb. He (1908: 58-59) provides an example in Swedish, which corresponds to the Finnish “*nuorna vitsa väännettävä*”, literally translated as “a twig has to be bended whilst it is young” (in order to be able to bend it at all).

Possibly these lines are an allusion to some such proverb. [...] At any rate, the meaning seems to be: ‘Yet it is hard to bow a woman against her will, [...] for her self-will is often due to her nature’. [...] For *tre* Skeat reads *trewe* [...] = true, straight, upright etc. According to his explanations, the sense may also be that it is hard to bend [straight] that which will not be upright. (Borgström 1908: 58-59)

Above in Borgström’s suggestion that women’s will originates from what woman’s *nature* is, we see another example of the style in which the woman is portrayed like Eve. Eve was forbidden to eat the fruit of a tree in Eden but wilfully, and with some push from the snake, she acted against the warning. Skeat offers another similar proverb to consider: “The tree growing crooked, if you’ll have it mended, Whilst that it is a twigg, it must be bended.” (1907: 61; spelling as in the original) and continues “The wilful woman is not one who objects to being a tree (i.e. to growing up) but to being a *straight* tree.” (ibid.)

Arngart, in his study, concludes that (as seen above) most scholars have taken the abovementioned lines “to contain allusion to a proverb of the type ‘crooketh the tree timely’” but states that he believes “no such allusion is intended” (1955: 177). The problematic part is the word ‘treowe’ in the Jesus MS, which Arngart (ibid.) states many have taken to refer to a tree but which in fact is to be derived from Old English “trustworthy, faithful [...], true” (1955: 176). The translation for the lines discussed above (294-5) provided by Arngart (1955: 176) is “Yet it is difficult to control that which (anyone who) will not remain faithful”. There is one certain proverbial allusion to be found in this section, however, in the lines 286-7 (“Idelschipe and ouer-prute / Þat lereþ yong wif vuele þewes”). Fiedler (2007: 85) mentions the proverb, “‘The devil finds work for idle hands to do’ (‘those who are not kept busy by the work will start doing harmful things’). The proverb is very old and in the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (5th edition) there is a long etymology to be found. The proverb is of biblical origin and according to the dictionary, “[i]dleness and mischief are linked in St. Jerome's Letter cxxv. xi. *‘fac et aliquid operis, ut semper te diabolus inueniat occupatum’*, do something, so that the devil may always find you busy”. It is further pointed out in the dictionary that for example Chaucer uses the proverb in one of his works, the *Tale of Melibee*: “*Therefore seith Seint Jerome: ‘Dooth somme goode dedes that the devel, which is oure enemy, ne fynde yow nat unocupied.’*”. Furthermore, it is also found in eighteenth century songs and proverb collections and a similar version, “whoever the devil finds idle he will employ” is described as a “homely proverb, which speaks a shrewd truth” (Fiedler 2007: 85).

Rouse (2005: 29) writes that “[i]n Alfred's society, wealth and women must be managed, and so must children”. In other words, it is for the best of the husband to keep his wife busy so that she will not have time to develop harmful manners and a wilful mind and - should she possess such already - she would ‘bend’, i.e. condescend and settle for her position in the marriage and in the household. A woman worn out with toil would probably not be interested in using her energy for bothering and pestering her husband, so he should feel responsible for providing her with enough tasks and, will he not, have only himself to blame. Again, the woman is something to keep an eye to, not one that can manage to stay out of trouble or show benevolence on her

own. This can be linked to Borgström's suggestion above: Men have to take responsibility over the women in their families (to 'bend' them, as Borgström and Skeat discuss on page 20 and 38 of this thesis), because women are, according to the Biblical story of Eve, necessarily disobedient, disrespectful and misbehaving.

6.5 Lines 296-305 (Keep Thy Wife Busy; as named by Skeat 1907)

The lines 296-305 are a part of the Jesus MS section 17, but because it is long, I have split it in two halves. I shall first give my rough translation of the lines in Modern English.

For ofte museþ þe kat 296
After hire moder.
þe mon þat let wymmon
his mayster iwurþe,
ne schal he neuer beon ihurd 300
his wordes louerd;
ac heo hine schal steorne
to-trayen and to-teóne;
and selde wurþ he blyþe and gled, 304
þe mon þat is his wiues qued.

A rough translation:

For often the cat catches mice
like her mother.
The man who lets a woman
to become his master
he shall never be heard to be
the lord of his words
but she shall him cruelly
torment and greatly vex;
and seldom will he be blithe and glad,
the man who is under his wife's scorn."

In the first two lines (296-7) there is to be seen a certain recurrent proverb pattern (Fiedler 2007: 46): Like X like Y ('like father like son', or in this case 'like mother like daughter'). The translations given by Borgström and Skeat are "for often the cat mouseth like her mother" (Borgström 1908: 59) and "For

the cat often catches mice in the same way as her mother" (Skeat 1907: 61). This sentence is a straightforward proverb (Arngart 1955: 177) which has parallels in for example Latin, German and French (ibid.). According to Arngart (ibid.) "[t]he proverb is found later in the form 'Cat will after kind'["] When these lines are considered in their context - that it is later hard to 'bend' what has grown crooked from beginning on - it is implied, clearly, that a disobedient mother will raise disobedient daughters. Noteworthy for the purpose of this thesis is thus the fact that what is *not* directly stated - that a fine woman will raise fine children. Again we see the misogynous attitude being the prevalent one in ll. 247-342 of the poem. Women are seen as creatures with far more negative characteristics than positive and it is also suggested that this is only natural.

Coming back to the idea of Rouse's (2005: 29) - the fact that women should be 'managed' - the poem continues with a warning of what will happen if this is not actualised. For this, Skeat (1907: 61) provides a detailed explanation. To quote, "He shall never be heard (to be) master of his word; but she shall sternly torment and vex him; and seldom shall he be blithe and glad, the man that is in his wife's aversion" (ibid.). Originally, line 298 ("Þe mon þat let wymmon") contained the word '(h)is wif' instead of 'wymmon' (Arngart 1942: 95). Arngart (ibid.) states that the Jesus MS scribe has applied the original statement ('the man who lets his wife...') in a more general way ('the man who lets a woman...') but is definitely wrong, as 'his wif' is "required by the context[.]" On line 300 ("ne schal he neuer beon ihurd") there is again an alteration made by the Jesus MS scribe against the other MSS (Arngart 1942: 82). The line is in other respects similar as in the other MSS except for an added word 'ihurd' at the end of it, which is there to create rhyme with 'louerd' on the following line (ibid.). Following Arngart (1942: 82), "in an earlier copy the form may have been *iherd* rather than *ihürd*" which, he states, would have created a better rhyme.

The scribe has also tried to produce rhyme in the lines 302-5 ("ac heo hine schal steorne / to-trayen and to-teóne; and selde wurþ he blyþe and gled / Þe mon þat is his wiues qued"). The lines, found also in the Trinity MS, originally seem to have contained alliteration (Arngart 1942: 83), but again, this is changed into a rhyme by the Jesus MS scribe with wording and adding an extra line (305) where 'qued' rhymes with the previous line's expression "blyþe

and gled". This combination (blyþe and gled), "frequent in ballads and later popular verse", replaces an old-fashioned wording ('sele' = 'happy') found in the Trinity MS (Arngart 1955: 177). For the word 'qued', as the original OE sense of the word is 'dung' and in ME, "bad or wicked person", 'the Evil One', and 'evil, mischief, harm'" (Arngart 1955: 177), Arngart (1942: 83) states that it seems to be forced into the context by the Jesus MS scribe and does not seem to fit it. This, again, shows the scribe's efforts to modernise the text and to create rhyme although sometimes impairing it in terms of odd word choices.

All this advice, in the opinion of Cannon (2010: 416) does not seem so much as any noble advice but they "do sound, very much, like the words of a school teacher." The same voice is heard also in the following sections. As the rest of the poem (all but the advice concerning women) consists of polite and fine advice given to nobility, the malevolence and a certain lack of sophistication of the lines 247-342 somehow strike one as an odd supplement. Arngart (1942: 76) notices a certain 'monkishness' in the style of writing of the scribe of *The Proverbs of Alfred* in, for example, the fact that he seems fond of "enlarging upon moral themes" (1942: 75). He also feels that although dealing with the subject of women in rather great detail, the "poet shows a misogynistic attitude that is the reverse of courtly and complimentary" (1955: 3).

6.6 Lines 306-316 (Woman Is Deceitful; named as a separate topic by myself)

Mony appel is bryht wiþ-vte,
and bitter wiþ-inne;
so is mony wymmon 308
on hyre fader bure;
schene vnder schete,
and þeyh heo is schendful.
So is mony gedelyng 312
godlyche on horse,
and is þeyh lutel wurþ ;...
wlonk bi þe glede
and vuel at þare neode.' 316

(Punctuation as in the original. At the end of line 314 Skeat notes with punctuation as well as a footnote, that there seems to be a line missing here.)

A rough translation is as follows:

Many an apple is fair on the outside
 and bitter on the inside
 as is many a woman
 in the lady's chamber of her father
 beautiful under the sheet
 and yet she is disgraceful.
 So is many lowborn companion
 excellent on a horse,
 and is, nevertheless, of little worth;
 fine by the fireside
 and lousy at the time of need.

Also these lines are a part of the section 17 in the Jesus MS, but in the longer Trinity MS they form a separate section starting with the phrase "Þus queþ Alured". Of the first two lines ("Mony appel is bryht wiþ-vte / and bitter wiþ-inne") Arngart (1955: 174) states that only the Jesus MS "preserves this proverb in its original form". It is an alliterating couplet (Arngart 1955: 41) and has "regular alliteration between *bryht* and *bitter*" (Arngart 1955: 175). The alliteration is spoiled in the other MSS with an added line after the two: "briht on beme/leme" (bright in the sunlight, Skeat 1907: 61) (Arngart 1955: 41). The proverb is found for example in *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer and it exists in addition in German language (ibid.). Arngart (1955: 41) continues that there are also more proverbs of similar sense in other languages and offers the example "All that glitters is not gold." The proverb in Finnish is "Ei kaikki kultaa, mikä kiiltää."

For line 309, "on hyre fader bure", there are controversial explanations. A reason for this is that in the Trinity MS it reads "in hire faire bure" (Borgström 1908: 13; Skeat 1907: 31; underlining added). Skeat has, in the edited text (ibid.) corrected the word 'faire' for 'fader' in brackets. Borgström comments on the word 'faire' as follows: "I think the original reading was *fader* [which Skeat also has; my shortened version of Borgström's text]." (1908: 58). For 'bure', Borgström (1908: 56) states that: "[bure] is especially applied to a lady's private apartment". Hence, they both seem to agree that the meaning is something like 'in their own lady's chamber which is owned by their father', i. e. 'in their father's household'.

Contrary to Borgström's and Skeat's opinion that line 309 reads 'on hyre fader bure', I would have accepted also the sentence as saying 'on hyre

faire bure' as it would then read in Modern English something like 'her fair (here: 'lovely' or perhaps 'bright') maiden's chamber'. With this reading, the implication that many women are first stated to be 'beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside' would be enhanced by describing them 'beautiful when covered under a veil in their fair chambers and yet disgraceful below the surface' when you truly get to know their alleged nature. Nevertheless, also Arngart (1955: 48) sees 'faire' as an error, justified by 'fader' in all the other MSS, but concludes that the word 'wymmon' may be an error as well. The discussed couplet does not contain rhyme or alliteration and following Arngart (ibid.), the absence of both may indicate corruption. He suggests (1955: 48) that for 'wimman' there should be 'burde' ('bride'; another word for 'woman') to create alliteration with 'bure'. Nevertheless, "if so, the error must have occurred in O1 too, the original common to the extant texts, for it is shared by them all." (Arngart 1955: 48).

For line 315 Skeat suggests that 'bi þe glede' should read as "beside the glowing coal, i.e. by the fireside" (1907: 62). Borgström (1908: 75), on the other hand, explains the lines followingly: "proud in mirth but miserable in need" deriving 'glede' from the Old English 'glæd' (gladness). He (ibid.) continues that "[p]roud vows, made at a merry party [...] were often contrasted with the performance of them in the hour of danger" and offers examples of other old works of literature where the same stylistic device is applied. For the purpose of this thesis I have settled for Skeat's explanation because firstly, this meaning of 'glede' (= fire, fireside) is also found in the *MED* and secondly, the word choice is also shared by the Cotton MS (Arngart 1955: 43). In a way also, the sense as 'at the fireside' could in the following way be considered to cover the 'merry party' that Borgström mentions above; there is a possibility in for instance many inns and taverns for people to gather around the fireside to enjoy the evening and the lines, in my opinion, refer to companions that may not be too familiar but may still be good and merry company in various kinds of social gatherings. A further reason is that the lines also refer especially to companions of low birth and, as it is mentioned, *The Proverbs of Alfred* are directly aimed at highborn noblemen and church officials. This, in my opinion, implies that the fast-made comrades that one may get in various social situations are still not equal to the high nobility who not only seem fine but can, contrary to the lowborn, also be trusted to be true to their word even 'at the time of need'.

6.7 Lines 317-328 (Avoid Women's Advice; as named by Skeat 1907)

þus queþ Alured:

‘[N]Eure þu, bi þine lyue,

þe word of þine wyue

to swiþe þu ne aréde. ... 320

[Skeat notes with punctuation and a footnote that there seems to be a line missing here]

If heo beo i-wreþþed

myd worde oþer myd dede,

wymmon wepeþ for mod

oftere þan for eny god; 324

and ofte, lude and stille,

for to vordrye hire wille;

Heo wepeþ oþer-hwile,

for to do þe gyle. 328

A crude translation of the above lines is as follows:

So says Alfred:

Never thou, in thy life,

the word of thy wife

too greatly listen.

If she is angered

with words or deeds,

a woman weeps for anger

rather than for any good reason;

and often, in all circumstances

for to promote her desire;

She weeps at various times

for to deceive you.

The explanation for the lines 318-26 offered by Skeat (1907: 62) is “Never do thou, in thy life, too seriously take as your counsel the word of thy wife. If she be angered by word or deed, a woman weeps for temper, oftener than for any good; and often, in all cases, in order to further her will”. In the translation, the part “oftener than for any good” seems odd, but a newer translation provided by Arngart (1955: 181) also adds the word “reason” (“For when (if) she becomes angry through words or deeds, woman weeps for rage rather than for any good (reason) and, aloud and soft, to further her wishes.”) which makes the sense of the lines much clearer.

For the line 318, “[N]Eure þu, bi þine lyue”, Arngart (1942: 84) states that it is probably added later as there is no counterpart for that in the Trinity MS and also no paired line in the Jesus MS. There is also, again, a rhyme in the Jesus MS between the words ‘lyue’ of the added line and ‘wyue’ on the following. Hence, it may be an alteration of the scribe or it may also be a consequence of “corruptions [...] in the original” (Arngart 1942: 84). The same kind of advice as in lines 318-20 is also found in other works of literature, mainly old Latin texts (Arngart 1955: 181) and thus the recommendation (= never in your life take the words of your wife too seriously) can be for the purpose of this thesis be considered proverbial in the traditional sense.

For the last word of the line 320, “to swiþe þu ne *aréde*”, Skeat offers in his glossary the modern English wording “accept as counsel [or] agree to” (1907: 62) whereas Borgström (1908: 61) offers a glossary translation “hear”. In short, Borgström’s translation is “Do not listen too much to the words of thy wife” (1908: 61). *Aréde*, as explained in the *MED online* (s.v. “arēden”, v.), directly means “to form or render an opinion, make a conjecture or guess”. As a whole, should one want to be as precise as possible, the line is “take as an advice too earnestly”. For ‘lude and stille’ on line 325, Skeat offers the following explanation: “*Lude and stille*, ‘loudly and silently’; a common adverbial expression, meaning ‘under all circumstances’[.]” (Skeat 1907: 62). The next line (326; *for to vordrye hire wille*) rhymes with *lude and stille*, and according to Arngart (1955: 42), the Jesus MS is the only one retaining the original form *vordrye* (‘to further, promote’), replaced for example in the Trinity MS with a word *wurthen* (‘to carry out’). *Vordrye*, he continues (ibid.), is rather rare a word whereas the substituted *wurthen* is more commonplace, and it also impairs the wanted sense of the line (ibid.).

For the *oþer-hwile* on line 327, possible translations are ‘now and then’, ‘sometimes’, ‘occasionally’, and ‘at various times’ (*MED*, s.v. “while” → “ōther-whīle”, adv.), of which the first and the last refer to time intervals relatively short, and those also seems to suit the context in providing an often deceitful image of a woman. The rhyming Old French word *gyle* (= deceive) on the last line seems to be a substitution (Arngart 1942: 90) for the original *biwilen* of the same meaning in the Trinity MS. Arngart (ibid.) states that *biwilen* “rhymes with *hwile* [on the previous line] [...] and alliterates with *wepeþ*” so this

substitution seems to be made purely because of word-modernisation as it does not create any new rhyme. For the two last lines, “she weeps sometimes only to deceive you”, parallels “of similar content [can be found] from Latin, French, Scand[inavian] and English sources[.] [...] ‘A girl’s word shall no one trust, nor that which a woman speaks’; [...] Ther is no trust in woman’s saw, No trust faith to belefe[.]” (Arngart 1955: 182). Nevertheless, although parallels exist, the phrase does not as such seem to be proverbial in the traditional sense.

As for the general message of the section, I would like to draw the attention again to Mieder's example on page 20 of this thesis (Mieder 1993: 65): “Women naturally deceive, weep and spin” and his statement that almost all proverbs even mentioning women show women in negative light (ibid.). *The Proverbs of Alfred* employs the Eve-style picture of a woman and, I find, also downgrades the person of a woman in the way he suggests (Mieder 1993: 65). Mann (2002: 57) states, that antifeminist writing in Medieval tradition was recurrent and drew force from still earlier works of literature. She lists the *Book of Solomon* to be one such (ibid.) work. The *Book of Solomon* is, coincidentally, also used in *The Proverbs of Alfred* as a 'source' for a statement on lines 329-330 (below in section 6.8). She continues that there are, in addition, various other texts, which include a number of what Mann calls “antifeministic proverbs and anecdotes” (Mann 2002: 57). One of the examples provided by Mann (2002: 57) is Jankyn's *Book of Wikked Wyves*. *The Book of Wikked Wyves* is a fictional book mentioned in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and contains various stories about treacherous women and the unhappy marriages caused by their behaviour.

For the purpose of this thesis, the fact that there is a fictional misogynous book inside a fictional work of Early Middle English literature, is important. It, on one hand, speaks on behalf of satire and ridicules misogynous attitudes by exaggerating them, and, on the other, reinforces the fact that misogynous texts were not unusual in the Middle Ages (Mann 2002: 26). I argue that the fact that misogyny is ridiculed and treated with irony proves that the people in Middle Ages did in fact, on the contrary, view women with respect. It is, in my opinion, not a proof of a misogynous society but a proof of the opposite, as the fictional *Book of Wikked Wyves* is a source of humour and sarcasm and thus indicates that a work such as that would have been regarded

as laughable. We come back to the idea of Weeks (2010: 1, see page 22 of this thesis) in that as 'crime fiction' is not literature for promoting crime: In this light, misogynous literature is not literature for promoting misogyny.

6.8 Lines 329-342 (Women's Counsel Is Cold; As named by Skeat 1907)

Salomon hit haueþ i-sed, 329
þat wymmon can wel vuelne red.
...
...
þe hire red foleweþ,
heo bryngeþ hine to seorewe. 332
For hit seyþ in þe l[e]oþ,
"as scumes, forteoþ";
hit is ifurn iseyd,
þat "cold red is quene red"; 336
hu he is vnlede
þat foleweþ hire rede.
Ich hit ne segge nouht for-þan
þat god þing [n]ys gid wymmon, 340
þe mon þe hi may icheose
and icouere over oþre.'
(Punctuation as in the original.)

Once more, a rough translation on the lines above:

Salomon it has said,
That woman knows well evil advice.
He who follows her counsel
she brings him to sorrow
For it says in the Song
how women deceive
it is long since said
that "a cold advice is a woman's advice"
oh, how he is miserable
he, who follows her advice.
Nevertheless I say
that a good woman is a good thing
provided a man could get to know her
and choose her from among other women.

Before going further in the analysis of this section of the poem, I would like to draw the reader's attention to a detail. For the last statement of the section, Skeat has in his edition of the Jesus MS Skeat provided *[n]ys* (line 340),

whereas Arngart in his much later edition (1955) has provided *ys* (Cannon 2010: 413-414, 431). The use of *ys* would, however, change the meaning to be “I do not say therefore that a good woman is a good thing when a man can choose her and win her over others” (Cannon 2010: 414). The use of *ys*, in this context, is clearly an error because with that there is no real point to the sentence and thus I argue the negation *[n]* indeed needs to be provided, as Skeat does.

On the lines 329-330, there is a reference to King Solomon, who, as mentioned before, was considered a wise speaker and an originator of many proverbs. Here he is claimed to have said that “women know well some evil advice”. Mentioning him here adds authority for King Alfred's utterance and, hence, a strong element of apparent truth for the citation. Nevertheless, although in *The Book of Solomon* the proverbial content is similar to that of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, the proverb is not found in the actual Solomon's proverbs. The proverbs of Solomon, like the ones of King Alfred, promote wise behaviour and acquiring wisdom and warn against foolishness. There are some that are about women, but the content in all of them seems to be either 'be a wise son in order to make your mother proud' or 'do not fall into temptation by strange women' [my summary].

On line 333, Skeat (1907: 62) has added the letter *[e]* in brackets as it originally, in the Jesus MS, reads only *loþ* and he states it to be an error, the correct form being *leoþ*, ‘a song’. This is also mentioned by Arngart (1955 :182). The word in the Trinity MS is *lede*, which Borgström (1908: 61) also translates as ‘song’ but he also notes (ibid.) that although Skeat, in his note to this line translates “in *þe l[e]oþ*” as “in the song”, however in his glossary “in *lede*” (as in the Trinity MS) is translated as “among people”. This seems troublesome because Skeat is normally rather consistent in his notes considering both manuscripts. As he has offered an explanation of the misspelling of ‘*l[e]oþ*’ and does not, in his explanatory section, offer any notes to the mentioned *lede* in the Trinity MS, I have decided to use the word ‘song’ in the final translation of the line. The following line (“as scumes, forteoþ”) reads in Modern English, according to Skeat (1907: 62) “like twilight shadows, (they) mislead (us)”. He also mentions that the exact line is found in the New English Dictionary (nowadays: Oxford English Dictionary) under the word ‘fortee’. The

OED explanation is “to draw away (to evil): to seduce” (*OED*, s.v. “fortee”, v.). Skeat (1907: 62) continues that unfortunately the song from which the quotation comes is unknown.

Arngart (1955: 182) on the other hand, offers a more plausible explanation for the lines. He concludes that the word ‘scumes’ is probably corrupt (*ibid.*) as there has been various suggestions for its meaning. He mentions for instance “‘?scum, bubbles’ [...]; ‘dusk, twilight’ [...]; ‘suggestion, persuasion, incitement’.” None of these is, in his opinion, completely satisfactory for various reasons and he concludes that “[t]he best suggestion is that of Brandl-Zippel’s glossary, which reads as *cuenes* [cuene, quene = woman; my addition] for as *scumes*: ‘It is said in the Song (the Book of Proverbs) as (how) women deceive’” (1955: 182). To support this view, I quote also Lapidge, who has written on the subject. He states that manuscripts of texts from Middle Ages are most often direct copies of an original but “have come down to us [having been] copied, usually many times” (Lapidge 2003: 107). Because of humane reasons, he continues, they may contain mistakes which may have been caused by eye-skip leading to omission or addition (*ibid.*). Other possible reasons are “miscomprehension of unfamiliar words and names, or voluntary errors caused by deliberate scribal interference (interpolation, emendation, and so on)” (Lapidge 2003: 107). In this light I find that ‘as cuenes’ is the most probable version of the possible translations.

The lines 335-6 (“hit is ifurn iseyd / þat “cold red is quene red””) contain another allusion, this time directly to a recognisable proverb. According to Arngart (1955: 182) the word pair ‘iseyd / red’ can be considered a rhyme as such, but also, the original form of ‘iseyd’ may have been ‘i-sed’, which makes even a better rhyme. Line 335 reads: “it has long since been said” followed by “that a woman’s advice is a cold advice” on line 336. Skeat (1907: 62-63) states that the proverb “will be found in the Icelandic dictionary, s. v. *kaldr* : - ‘Köld eru opt kvenna-rāð,’ cold [fatal] are oft women’s counsels.” [punctuation as in the original]. He (1907: 63) continues that there is a corresponding Latin text, “uulgo dici consuevit, Consilium feminine nimis carum aut nimis uile” and mentions that Chaucer uses also this proverb in *The Canterbury Tales* (*The Tale of Melibee*) (Skeat 1907: 62; also Arngart 1955: 182). The translation for the

proverb is “[T]he counsel of women is either too costly or worth very little” (Chaucer 2011: 371) and it is also mentioned by Borgström (1908: 61).

Schieberle discusses the female counselor in her article "Thing Which a Man Mai Noght Areche": Women and Counsel in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Gower's work dates some hundred years after the Jesus MS of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, but, Schieberle has discussed about advice-giving by women in general and I find her study to be of much use. The *Confessio Amantis*, that Schieberle discusses, tells a story of a young lay woman who, at the end, ends up as a king's wife. The narrative, in short, tells of a masculine ruler of some sort, who is quick to judge and aggressive. The woman in the narrative is in a submissive but at the same time in a counselling position to the man and although not making a number out of herself, persuades and, gently guiding, tempers the man to reconsider cruel judgement and showing kindness to the less fortunate. (Schieberle 2007: 94-99). She is depicted as wise and kind, but also sly, making good use of her low social status and role, e.g. kneeling (signifying her low rank in front of those with more power) when it may further her cause (Schieberle 2007: 98). In the narrative, a woman is, contrary to *The Proverbs of Alfred*, seen as a remarkably good advisor. There are other contemporary literary texts as well, Schieberle (2007: 92, 96 etc.) notes, where woman's counselling is seen as a means to 'feminize' the leader in a good way. Women are, in other words, able, as more 'delicate' and emotional creatures, especially to inflict pity on their husbands and if needed, other decision-makers, for example in the court. Women are non-threatening and need not be seen as rivals (Schieberle 2007: 99).

Skeat, in the edition of the Jesus MS, records two lines missing in this passage (the dotted lines after line 330). In his edition of the Trinity MS version which is complete with no lines missing, he has the following:

“Hue ne mai hit non oþir don,
for wel erliche hue hit bi-gan.”

The lines translate roughly as “She cannot do otherwise / for she began it very early” (Arngart 1955: 182). Borgström (1908: 17) and Arngart (1955: 182) suggest that these lines, missing from the Jesus MS, refer to Eve, and it is easy

to see that it functions as a generic reference to *every* woman. The reference seems to be directly to the first woman giving a bad advice (Eve tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit) (Borgström 1908: 17), and also from this passage we can see the clerical influence on the writing of *The Proverbs of Alfred* (Borgström 1908: xvi; Rouse 2005: 24). Reference to Eve and her 'evilness', caused by committing the original sin, once again enhances the viciousness of *all* women. Furthermore, the line seems to suggest that the viciousness cannot fully be eliminated ["she cannot do otherwise"]. To me this suggests that in the compiler's opinion the 'evil quality' obviously seems to be naturally hereditary. Arngart (1955: 182) suggests that the lines may be a scribe's addition to the Trinity MS as they seem only "loosely inserted" and therefore the Jesus MS would have retained the original content of this section.

As stated, and as is clear to see, many of the attitudes towards women in 13th century literary texts spring up from the Bible, where it was Eve who, persuaded by the Devil, committed the original sin. It is not, then, a far-fetched conclusion that women must be easily deceived (by the evil) and weak in understanding and faith, and hence it seems advisable not to trust a female and not to give them too much freedom. Clark (1997: 112-113) writes that even in the centuries following the Anglo-Saxon era, women were by general principle considered to be

by nature weaker than men in respect to fundamental intellectual and psychological qualities and, hence, had [...] 'a greater facility to fall'. [...] [T]heir 'inordinate affections and passions' made them resentful of authority and difficult to discipline so that they were always a potential threat to God's order. The key to their wickedness lay, above all, in their carnal appetites, which were far greater than those of men. Women were thus feeble in mind and unstable in behaviour inherently imperfect creatures from whom evil and depravity were only to be expected.
(Clark 1997: 112-113)

For the line 337, "hu he is vnlede", I provide in the translation 'Oh, how' for 'hu'. The word could be translated as only 'how' but according to the *MED* online, 'hu' (s.v. "hōu", interrog. adv.) was also used in the sense of "(a) in what a way!; (b) to what an extent or degree!" in exclamations. As the exclamation sign left out in all the lines of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, I find this may be the way the poet has expressed an actual outcry. Furthermore, 'vnlede' also

rhymes with the 'rede' on the next line, which seems to reinforce the sense of a poetic exclamation. The lines occur only in the Jesus MS but seem to be authentic (Arngart 1955: 182).

At the very end of the sections studied in this thesis, on the lines 339-342, we get to a sort of praise for good women. Of these, the first line, "Ich hit ne segge nouht for-Pan", contains a double negative 'ne - nouht' but according to Skeat (1907: 63) this is "equivalent to a single negative". Following Arngart (1955: 182) the actually redundant 'ne' "may be taken as a reinforcement of *nouht*", and so that, in my opinion, puts weight on the acclaim and suggests, that the conclusion which is stated after the expression seems at least to some extent earnest and sincere. The two first lines (339-340) are translated by Skeat (1907: 63) as "I do not say this because a good woman is not a good thing" and the following lines (341-2) as "'for the man that may choose her, and gain (her) over others', i.e. 'as against other wooers'" (ibid.). According to Arngart (1955: 183), however, the word 'over', here, stands for 'in preference to'. Borgström's slightly more complicated translation (1908: 61-62) is "I do not say it therefore (= I do not mean by these words) that a good woman should not be a good thing if a man (to a man who) only might know her and choose her from among others." (A newer wording by Arngart (1955: 182) is "Nevertheless I say that a good woman is a good thing[...].")

Arngart (1942: 91), comparing the Trinity MS and Jesus MS, states that it is easier to accept the Trinity MS reading of these lines. In it, the last two lines are as follows (ibid.): "Pe mon Pat michte hire cnowen / ant chesen hire from oPere.", i. e., 'The man that might know her and choose her from among others' [my translation]. The reason for the acceptance is that, as seen above in Skeat's translation, 'i-cheose' and 'i-couere' of the Jesus MS mean 'choose' and 'gain' or 'get', correspondingly. Following Arngart (1942: 91), "The T[rinity MS] reading gives a better meaning, for the whole of the preceding portion of the section is to the effect that woman often deceives a man: it is therefore essential to *know* her before choosing her." [Emphasis as in the original]. Lines 339-342, as we can see, are not strictly a direct compliment but they are, nevertheless, a notion of the fact that there are also good women as opposed to the ones described in the other 91 lines. Arngart (1955: 3) summarises that after everything the poet has stated in the various sections on the 'qualities' of

women, he, at the end “- a little grudgingly it would seem - concedes that a good woman, provided she can be found, is a good thing[.]” It remains, however, an important duty for a man to choose the future wife carefully for as the rest of all the sections about women (ll. 247-338) show, it is told in detail what will happen if the man, for any possible reasons, makes a bad choice.

7 ORAL RECITAL AND AUDIENCE

Volk-Birke has studied Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and medieval preaching. *The Canterbury Tales* is approximately of the same age as the MSS of *The Proverbs of Alfred* and the style of *The Proverbs of Alfred* also seems to correspond Volk-Birke's themes (audience persuasion and oral preaching). For both these reasons I have used Volk-Birke as a reference. I also justify the use of *The Canterbury Tales* as a reference to the Jesus MS version of *The Proverbs of Alfred* because Arngart (1942: 76) uses of the scribe the term 'reviser'. Arngart thus gives credit to the fact that the text of the Jesus MS, up to some extent, resorts to newer stylistic devices (e.g. rhyme) than the other MSS, and may have additions (more lines, loanwords etc.) that partly update the original text to a new century.

The sermon was in the Middle Ages the most important medium to influence people and instructions, explanations and encouragements to Christian ways were given using persuasion techniques – both emotional and rational (Volk-Birke 1991: 42-43). Timing and rhythm are important factors in preaching (Volk-Birke 1991: 57) as are also examples, that attract interest in listeners and keep up their attention (Volk-Birke 1991: 65), and, to help memorizing, repetition (1991: 205). Rhythm is easily achieved in *The Proverbs of Alfred* by using a poetical form (alliteration and, especially in the Jesus MS, rhyme), examples are widely available and repetition is provided in the beginning of each theme of the text as well as, in many sections, a small summary at the end of a topic. Volk-Birke continues to explain, that in narratives and sermons “[a]uthorities are introduced [for example] by “as seith... or - - “I rede”, and variations of these (ibid.). The reference “So says Alfred:” also follows the example.

The poem's address and message closely resemble a sermon. Moreover, the poem seems remind a narrative such as *The Canterbury Tales*. These facts may suggest, that even though there is no sign of such, the text has been intended, besides reading, for recitation. According to Volk-Birke (1991: 303): "Obviously, there are no immediate records of medieval orality. [...] However, we do know something about the delivery of [Chaucer's] works, since it was customary to recite to a circle of men and women from a manuscript, thus creating a communal situation which had some features in common with traditional orality." Also Frank (2003: 154) suggests, that passing a harp or a lyre from hand to hand in feasts as to tell a tale was a typical custom of the Anglo-Saxon time. On behalf of oral recital it should also be noted that "[i]n a society without widespread literacy - - preaching was the most important vehicle of teaching, be it the Scripture - - or catechetical information[.] (Volk-Birke 1991: 26). Christian doctrine is seen as the absolute truth and oral citing was the most effective means to reach large amounts of people (ibid.).

If we consider *The Proverbs of Alfred* as a text for 'preaching' or, here, teaching, it would seem well considered for the scribe to add rhyme and alliteration. As there are only four surviving manuscripts of *The Proverbs of Alfred*, it will not as a written copy have reached all possible school pupils. It seems to me more likely that there has been a teacher who has recited the book and the pupils have been told to memorise the text. Therefore, oral citing could be a reason for revising the original in such large amount. Oral recital would have been, as stated in the above chapter, an effective means to reach all the pupils (or any possible audience) at once.

Normally, there are no real visible signs or markings in the texts of the Middle Ages, that they have been targeted for recitation. As Frank (2003: 158) puts it, trying to find signs of that an Anglo-Saxon poem is intended for oral recital is as hard as trying to find their wooden buildings. They were there but in the centuries following the era they have vanished altogether (ibid.) so it is not possible to prove a poem is intended to be recited to an audience.

8 CONCLUSION

I set out to write this thesis with an open mind as I had never before come across *The Proverbs of Alfred*. As stated in the introduction, I was not sure of how the text is meant to be received. My initial thought when browsing through the pages was that the poem is written primarily for entertainment. At the same time, however, another option I considered was that it is a work serving as a serious guideline for Christian life. It was hard to tell as there are elements of both; poetical teachings but also what I perceived to be certain sarcasm (e.g. poetic illustrations of a man with a lousy wife, wailing and weeping for his poor choice). The more I studied my source material, the more I came to conclude that the poem's primary aim is not serious guidance in life but entertainment and, on the basis of Cannon (2010: 415-416), perhaps school teaching.

In the end, *Alfred*, whether it be the real King Alfred or a fictional character made up for didactical purposes (Cannon 2010: 415-416), is a man talking to other men. There is no-one to feminize his thoughts (Schieberle 2007: 92, 96) and as schooling and literacy were almost entirely the luxury of men, it is very probable that neither the writer of the original nor the scribe is a woman. The text is thus, in a way, all 'masculine'. Perhaps the composer had a need to enforce the targeting towards the male gender especially by removing femininity from the text, but the possible reason (if this ever was the case) remains a mystery. May the advice, given by men to men, deliberately accentuate the weakness of a counsel by a woman and if so, what for? Does it add more assertivity to men's advice? We can keep in mind the explanation given by Cannon 2010: 414: "the bulk of Alfred's 'advice' has no particular applicability to kings, courts, or a particular historical occasion, but is offered, rather, in the voice of a generalized age and experience to a generalized 'youth'." If this is a schoolbook, it is indeed written by men to men and the masculine style may seem effective when it comes to teaching young men. If this is a schoolbook, it also is one more reason to assume that it does not represent the normal everyday or the time of writing (or the time of King Alfred). Instead, it would be a text used for example on learning administrative and organisational skills as well as sheer reading and writing.

As for genre, *The Proverbs of Alfred* is didactic poetry. Of what proverbial wisdom kernels are found in the stanzas (see page 24 of this thesis), only some can be classified as traditional proverbs. The title of the work, in this light, does not seem entirely appropriate. It is, nevertheless, understandable and well considered, and the most plausible explanation for titling seems to be the exploitation of a Biblical model (i.e. the Book of Proverbs; see page 21 and 26 of this thesis; Cannon 2010: 415-416) as the poem consists of same kinds of "units of teaching" (Weeks 2010: 1). The religious taste of the title may perhaps increase the amount of interested readers and/or persuade a reader to easily adopt the ideas presented in the work. The reader may expect to get some good moral guidelines, yet *The Proverbs of Alfred* is first and foremost poetry, not guidance. The moral guidelines that are offered do follow the style of the guidelines in the Bible but seem not to be taken seriously. There is little humour as for how it is seen today but on the other hand, it cannot be said for sure what the reception for the text was like more than seven hundred years back. It is very similar to *The Canterbury Tales* (Volk-Birke 1991: 299) which, clearly, is not a work to promote wisdom or offer religious guidelines but to entertain and this seems to be the case also with the MSS' contemporary *The Owl And The Nightingale*.

Coming back to the discussion about currency and traditionality (see section 4.1 of this thesis, page 17 onwards), the 'proverbial extent' in *The Proverbs of Alfred* has had parallels in other works of literature of the time and has thus enjoyed currency at least among the more learned circles. On the whole the text on the ll. 247-342 has very little proverbial content in the traditional sense. If we consider the text of the poem not to consist of proverbs there would be little possibility to evaluate the lexicality and currency. However, if we expand the term 'lexicality' to cover the language understanding and familiarity, it can be argued that the style of the poem and of the text (and possibly topics) was in peoples' 'lexis'. This can also be applied to the ll. 247-342, as also misogyny in literature was conventional and traditional (see page 7 of this thesis), and thus the way of speech was in the language use of the people. Currency, followingly, is more easily proven: there were parallels to the MSS such as *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Proverbs of Hendyng* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which, even based on the amount of their many MSS,

seem to have been popular. The poems have a frame story inside which information is provided, and all contain life teachings. In this light I find the text has been current in its day.

Rouse (2005: 40) suggests that the poem could be considered a social commentary but as for the lines 247-342, in the light of Eve/Mary dichotomy being prevalent in writing (see pages 5-7 of this thesis) I disagree with him. There were two popular ways of writing about women and the composer has chosen the Eve-type, which probably does not reflect the real everyday at all. To a modern reader, the text may awaken dissatisfaction or irritation but it is to remember that it is not targeted to a modern reader and does not reach the audience the same way it did in the thirteenth century. If we keep in mind that misogyny was conventional in the literature of the Middle Ages (Mann 2002: 26), it was of course also familiar to the audience. Familiarity helps a listener to be able to identify with the topic, and misogynous style must have been an easy device to employ. This in turn, I find, may suggest, that the audience could well have enjoyed it and even wished for its appearance in literal texts.

The misogyny present in the text is not a direct attack towards women but a conventional style (Clark 1997: 117, Mann 2002: 26) of the literature of the Middle Ages. Social activism such as feminism, to stand up to women in literature, did not appear in centuries following the composing of *The Proverbs of Alfred* and even if it had, women were not the literate part of the society and in a position to be able to write about themselves (see page 30 of this thesis). On the part of the misogyny, this is one work of literature in a huge mass of texts, which deteriorates the value of woman and, as Mieder (1993: 70-71) puts it, “[a]lmost every proverb that touches on women contains a severe negation of the value of women in society.” Written language (as well as citing) is even today a powerful tool for creating opinions and also prejudice. As mentioned above, (see page 35 of this thesis) agree with Mieder (ibid.) on that it will take a very long time to repair the damage misogynous proverbs have done to the social value of and the attitudes towards a woman.

The poem leaves me with questions considering the possible female audience. On audience in general, I find it hard to pinpoint any specific group of listeners for the text for there is 'something for everyone'; if the

audience would consist only of monks, why give fatherly advice to someone who has chosen to live without possessions or family? If it were targeted for the nobility, why give advice on the tasks of a priest to a knight? There are advice for raising up a child, about choosing a wife and about organising oneself a happy life in old age. It seems an impossible task to name one certain group for whom the poem is written to, but it is easy to say that *literally* it is not targeted for women. It offers no advice for them for any aspect of life although if aimed to entertain, the text may well be meant for them also. Nevertheless, with all this consideration, it seems to me quite plausible, that Cannon's suggestion above could be true: *The Proverbs of Alfred* could be in sort a 'general' work of literature indeed aimed for school teaching as well as, I think, oral citing for the pleasure of a group of hearers. We are restricted to some guesswork.

There is also another viewpoint in considering, whether *The Proverbs of Alfred* would most importantly be a schoolbook. Frank (2003: 153) writes that "[w]e confuse the reconstructed [past in poems] [...] with the far different world in which their authors lives and worked[.]". We are prone to think that a Middle Age poem with a frame story of a knights and priests is also targeted for knights and priests; the subject of the poem in our minds easily becomes also the target audience (ibid.). Frank suggests that the idea is not realistic; instead, he argues, we might as well say that the target audience of Walt Disney's cartoons are ducks and mice (ibid.). Followingly, the idea that *The Proverbs of Alfred* is written as a guideline for nobility seems to be unrealistic. It does not really teach warcraft or the Bible, subjects, that might be of use for clerics or cavalry. Instead, also Frank's suggestions above give way to the idea that *The Proverbs of Alfred* is written for either as a schoolbook to be memorised easily or (or possibly, at the same time as) entertainment for lay audience.

On the ll. 247-342 it is repeatedly said that women are vile and deceitful and it is suggested that they should be kept busy in household and other chores in order to prevent them from intriguing and misbehaving. In other words, women have to be "managed" (Rouse 2005: 29), and the responsibility seems to first fall on fathers and later on, on husbands. As it was seen, *The Proverbs of Alfred* had one good thing to say about (some) women. However, I argue that in some aspects *The Proverbs of Alfred* has, rather, good things to

say about a *man* who is capable for making a good decision, as it is the man that needs to know and choose her. It is, as it were, and indirect praise of a woman who has proved herself to be worthy of appreciation. Besides this short expression of respect, nevertheless, the terrible warnings and grumpy advice for the 'choosing' cover all the rest of the ll. 247-342 of *The Proverbs of Alfred*; that is, the abovementioned recognition consists of four lines whereas the rest of the text considering women and their various faults extends to 91 lines.

In the end, I feel that the work did not change or affect the society in the way I started out believing. In my mind, I compared the poem with the catechism or a similar biblical text giving serious advice about the everyday and followingly considered it an influential text in terms of religion. However, the more material I read the more I came to realise it could not be compared with the such. According to Volk-Birke (1991: 42), many texts of the time were not directly supposed to teach people but to promote piety, a good Christian way of life and for example stir emotions and "hold up models which were to be emulated". Volk-Birke continues, that the importance and impact of texts is, nevertheless, not to be overestimated – for every literate and at all interested person who actually read any text there were masses of people who demonstrated no interest whatsoever.

It has been interesting but challenging to try to find studies of the feminine views and voices for the purpose of this thesis. At the same time, I came to realise that some views I wanted to find for a good discussion – women's own voice and perhaps their writings in which they would write about victorious and respectable women – just are not there. There is not, as stated above, almost any text written by women. There are, however, contradictory poetical images of women in the texts little younger than *The Proverbs of Alfred*, written by men. Slowly there emerged, besides Eve/Mary, also other ways of describing women in text. The scribes' contemporaries, for example Chaucer and Boccaccio, did not write of women as the composer of *The Proverbs of Alfred*. They wrote of women of more character, also of joyous and strong women (Mann 2002: 5-7) instead of vicious subjects that need constant monitoring.

The views of women's place in the society in Middle Age texts is one that hopefully can be, in the case of scarce material written by women,

studied further. I hope I have offered the reader at least some ideas on how it can and is being studied and what conclusions have been made based on the material that exists. The text does perhaps not reflect the everyday of the society but it does inform one about the literary traditions and textual and stylistic devices of its time. I hope the study of women and their voices in the literature of the Middle Ages continues and that more information on their real everyday can be found and abstracted.

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APPENDIX 1: FINNISH SUMMARY

Suomenkielinen lyhennelmä

1 JOHDANTO

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on valottaa 1200-luvun runoteosta *The Proverbs of Alfred*, jossa tarjotaan lukijalle elämänohjeita. Ohjeiden antajaksi teoksessa nimetään kuuluisa Alfred Suuri, jonka valtakausi oli 800-luvulla. Teos sisältää muun muassa ohjeita siitä, mitkä ovat ritarin tehtävät, miten kohdella toisia ihmisiä sekä ohjeita sopivan vaimon etsimiseen ja naisen kanssa elämiseen. *The Proverbs of Alfred* on kaksiosainen, mutta olemassa olevien neljän käsikirjoituksen sisällöt vaihtelevat suuresti ja ovat osittain hyvin puutteellisia. Tähän tutkielmaan on valittu MS Jesus College, Oxford, 29:n riveiltä 247-342 löytyvä osio, joka keskittyy yllämainittuun vaimon löytämiseen ja hänen kanssaan elämiseen. Syy valinnalle on se, että tutkielmaan oli tarpeen saada pitkästä teoksesta jokin tarkasti rajattu osa, ja lisäksi olin kiinnostunut siitä, miten *The Proverbs of Alfred* naisia kuvaa. Rivit 247-342 ovat ainoita, joissa nainen teoksessa mainitaan.

Tutkielmaa tehdessäni huomasin, että *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n naisista kertovat osiot ovat asenteeltaan hyvin misogynistisiä eli naisvihamielisiä. Tässä tutkielmassa pyrin tarjoamaan kommentointia ja lisätietoa siihen, mikä naisen sosiaalinen asema todellisuudessa oli ja millä tavoin *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n antama kuva mahdollisesti vastaisi todellisuutta. Tutkielmassani pohdin myös sitä, mikä teoksen todellinen tarkoitus lienee ollut sekä sitä, millaiselle yleisölle se on suunnattu. Lisäksi pyrin tarjoamaan yhteenvedon siitä, mitä eri tutkijat ja tekstin editoijat ovat kyseisten rivien sanavalinnoista ja mahdollisista käsinkopiointivaiheiden kirjoitusvirheistä kommentoineet.

Sanan *scribe* käännöksenä käytetään tässä lyhennelmässä sanaa kirjuri, ja sanan *manuscript* käännöksenä sanaa käsikirjoitus. Sanan *proverb* käännöksenä käytetään sanaa sananlasku.

2 LÄHTEET JA TERMIT

Käyttämäni lähteet ovat osin vanhentuneita, joten haluan perustella niiden valintaa. *The Proverbs of Alfred* on teksti, joka kiinnosti tutkijoita etenkin 1900-luvun alkupuolella, ja kaksi käyttämäni editiota kommentteineen ovatkin vuosilta 1907 (Skeat) ja 1908 (Borgström). Vuonna 1955 siitä julkaistiin kattava kommentointi ja tutkimus (Arngart), mutta tätä myöhempiä lähteitä juuri tästä nimenomaisesta tekstistä on ollut haastavaa löytää. Saatavilla oli muutamia artikkeleita, mutta pääasiassa olen etenkin rivien kirjurivirheiden, kirjurin tekemien muutosten ja sanavalintojen kommentoinnissa *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n nojannut näihin kolmeen lähteeseen.

The Proverbs of Alfred:n kommentoinnissa usein käyttämäni termi ”misogynistinen” ei nykypäivän miellelyhtymiltään vastaa täysin sitä, mitä se on 1200-luvun kirjallisuudessa tarkoittanut. *The Proverbs of Alfred* käyttää misogynistä tekstiä ja kirjoitustapaa tyylikeinona, jota tuskin on tarkoitettu erityisen halventavaksi, saati todelliseksi ohjenuoraksi naisten kanssa elämiseen – keskiaikaisessa kirjallisuudessa misogynistinen kirjoitustapa oli tavanomaista (Mann 2002: 26) ja on todennäköisesti auttanut tekstin lukijaa tai kuulijaa samastumaan tekstiin ja nauttimaan siitä.

Keskiaikaisessa kirjallisuudessa asenne naisia kohtaan oli lisäksi hyvin raamatullinen: nainen nähtiin pääasiassa helposti houkutuksiin lankeavana, ns. ”heikompana astiana”, joka ei osannut itse tehdä hyviä päätöksiä ja oli taipuvainen pahantekoon ja vilppiin (Clark 1997: 114) (tässä tutkielmassa ns. ”Eeva”-tyyppi). Toinen mahdollinen kuvaustapa naisesta oli pyhimysmäinen (Mann 2002: 1) (ns. ”Maria”-tyyppi). Juuret tällaiselle kahtiajaolle ovat jo antiikin Roomassa (ibid.) ja nämä kirjallisuudessa käytetyt kuvaukset ovat olleet suuressa osassa siinä, millaisia stereotyyppisiä käsityksiä naisista on olemassa (Mann 2002: 2; Mieder 1993: 71). Tätä ”Eeva/Maria” -kahtiajakoa käsittelen tutkielmani analyysiosiossa sekä yhteenvedossa tarkemmin.

3 THE PROVERBS OF ALFRED

The Proverbs of Alfred -runoteos sisältää elämänohjeita, jotka on järjestetty osioihin. Yksi osio käsittelee yhtä aihetta. Esimerkiksi riveillä 247-342 osioihin lukeutuvat muun muassa *Choose No Evil Wife* (rivit 247-284) sekä *Keep Thy Wife Busy* (rivit 285-316). *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n käsikirjoituksista kaikissa on perusosa, joka koostuu 23 osiosta. *The Proverbs of Alfred*:sta on nykypäivälle säilynyt neljä käsikirjoitusta: MS Cotton Galba A. XIX; MS Maidstone Museum A. 13; MS Trinity College, Cambridge, B. 14. 39 sekä MS Jesus College, Oxford, 29. Näistä Trinity Collegen käsikirjoitus on pisin, ja sisältää *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n perusosan (ohjeita pääasiassa ylhäisölle ja papistolle sekä neuvoja vaimon hankintaan) lisäksi myös toisen kokonaisen osan (14 osiota), joka sisältää isällisiä neuvoja pojalle (ks. sivu 9). Toinen osio ei kuitenkaan tutkijoiden mukaan ole välttämättä alun perin ollut *The Proverbs of Alfred*:ssa vaan vaikuttaisi enemmänkin olevan myöhempi lisäys (Arngart 1942: 114).

Tässä tutkielmassa on käytetty Skeatin vuoden 1907 edition tekstiä, joka on MS Jesus College, Oxford, 29:sta (myöhemmin: Jesus MS). Analyysiosion numerointi vastaa Skeatin edition numerointia. Skeatin editio on löydettävissä kokonaisuudessaan verkossa (ks. lähdeluettelo). Syy tämän lähteen valintaan on se, että tutkijoiden mukaan Jesus MS vaikuttaa olevan kaikkein lähimpänä alkuperäistä tekstiä (Arngart 1955: 39; ks. Sivu 15-16). On mahdollista, että Jesus MS on eriytynyt *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n arkkityypistä eri aikaan kuin muut kolme käsikirjoitusta, ja siten edustaa kokonaan eri sukulinjaa. Tämä voisi selittää sen, miksi muissa teksteissä ilmenee enemmän virheitä ja esimerkiksi puutteita kopioinnissa (Arngart 40-49; ks. Sivu 15).

4 SANANLASKUN MÄÄRITELMÄ

Sananlaskut ovat lyhyitä lausahduksia, jotka sisältävät yleensä jonkinlaisen viisauden (Mieder 1993: 25). Käsite on epätarkka; on vaikea määritellä vaihtelurajoja sille, mikä voidaan määritellä sananlaskuksi ja mikä taas vastaa enemmän esimerkiksi selityksen tai pohdinnan määritelmää. Yksi vaikeus määritelmässä on se (Mieder 1993: 6), että sananlaskun odotetaan yleensä olevan jollakin tavoin ”perinteinen”. Sen oletetaan olevan myös vakiintunut

kieleen ja jossakin määrin aktiivisesti tunnettu ja käytössä (Fiedler 2007: 21 ja Mieder 1993: 6), jotta se voidaan kategorisoida nimenomaan sananlaskuksi. *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n aikalaisissa on samankaltaisia sanontoja kuin itse teoksessa (Arngart 1955: 7-8), joten vastaavien sanontojen ja kirjallisuudessa esiintyneiden asenteiden voidaan olettaa olleen yleisiä sillä hetkellä, kun teoksen arkkityyppi on tehty. Kaikki sanonnat eivät kuitenkaan tunnu täyttävän varsinaisen sananlaskun määritelmää, ja yhteenvedossa pohdin tarkemmin sitä, voiko *The Proverbs of Alfred*:a todella kutsua sananlaskukokoelmaksi vai pitäisikö se kategorisoida ennemminkin didaktisten eli opettavien runojen kategoriaan.

Sananlaskut voivat käsitellä mitä tahansa elämänpiirin aiheita, kuten ystävyyttä tai lasten kasvatusta. Samalla ne helposti saattavat sisältää myös erilaisia arvoja. Naisiin liittyvät sananlaskut ovat hyvin usein halventavia, ivallisia tai jopa vihamielisiä (s. 18-19). Vaikka tällaiset koetaan nykyään sopimattomaksi, niissä näkyvät asenteet ovat tuttuja myös nykyään, vaikka niitä käytetäänkin kenties enemmän huumorimieleessä kuin varsinaisina neuvoina. Monia naisia koskevia sananlaskuja on myös muokattu nykyajan ilmapiiriin sopiviksi ja naisia kunnioittavammiksi (Mieder 1993: 70-71; s. 20), esimerkkinä "A woman's place is in the House... and in the Senate!" (s. 20), mutta näistä huolimatta misogynististen sananlaskujen aiheuttamaa vahinkoa naisten arvolle on hankalaa ja hidasta korjata.

5 'ALFREDIN SANANLASKUN' MÄÄRITELMÄ

Kuten yllä on kerrottu, *The Proverbs of Alfred* ei sisällä pelkästään sananlaskuja vaan ennemminkin ohjeistusta ja opetusta. Tämä on tyypillistä didaktiselle kirjallisuudelle. *The Proverbs of Alfred* sisältää ajatelmia, jotka ovat hyvin samankaltaisia kuin sananlaskut, mutta joille ei löydy mitään suoraa vastinetta muusta aikalaiskirjallisuudesta. Lisäksi jokaisessa osiossa on alkuasetelma (ks. tarkemmin esimerkkejä sivuilta 27-47), neuvoja sekä varoituksia heille, jotka eivät kyseistä neuvoa noudata. Usean lauseen kokonaisuus ei varsinaisesti täytä sananlaskun määritelmää (Arngart 1955: 1, ks. myös yllä). Osioissa tuntuu olevan tietynlainen "sananlaskullinen ydin" (Cannon 2010: 414), mutta tarkempi luokitus teokselle on yllä mainittu didaktinen kirjallisuus sekä viisaukskirjallisuus.

Viisaukirjallisuudelle ominaista on se, että sitä sanelee joku yleisesti viisaaksi määritelty taho. *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n tapauksessa opettajana toimii Alfred Suuri, jota on usein (myös *The Proverbs of Alfred*:ssa) kutsuttu viisaaksi ja hyväksi hallitsijaksi (Skeat 1907: 4; rivit 19-24 sekä Rouse 2005: 20-21). Tästä kertoo myös se, että Alfred Suuri mainitaan sananlaskujen ja elämänohjeiden kertojana muissakin teoksissa (esimerkiksi *The Owl and the Nightingale*) (Arngart 1955: 7-8) sekä se, että hänet on *The Proverbs of Alfred*:ssa nostettu päähenkilöksi, vaikka Alfredin hallinnon (800-luku) ja teoksen arkkityypin kirjoittamisen (1200-luku) välillä aikaa on kulunut noin 400 vuotta.

6 ANALYYSI (Rivit 247-342; Skeatin editio vuodelta 1907)

6.1 Rivit 247-257 (Choose No Evil Wife, s. 27-30)

Naisia käsittelevän osuuden ensimmäisessä osiossa annetaan miehelle varoituksia siitä, miten pieleen tulevan vaimon valinta voi mennä. Osiossa käsitellään muun muassa sitä, mitä omaisuutta nainen voi avioliittoon tuoda ja kerrotaan, että tätä ei kuitenkaan tule käyttää perusteena vaimon valinnassa. Ulkopuoli voi pettää. Mieluummin kuin luottaa ulkokuoreen miehen tulisi tutustua naiseen ja hänen todelliseen luonteeseensa, jonka nainen ”näyttää pian”. Lähtöoletuksena on, että nainen on petollinen ja huijaa miehen uskomaan olevansa jotakin parempaa kuin aidosti on.

Uskonnolliset tahot oletetusti odottivat ja määrittivät, että naisen tuli käyttäytyä hillitysti ja siveästi, ja käytösihanteena olivat raamatussa mainitut hyveelliset naiset (Jewell 1996: 18; s. 30). Kyseisistä määritelmistä ja niiden vastaavuudesta keskiajan arkeen ei ole olemassa naisten kirjoittamia lähteitä, koska naiset olivat lähes kokonaan luku- ja kirjoitustaidottomia. Sen lisäksi, että naiset nähtiin alisteisena ihmisryhmänä, joiden käytöstä määrittelivät miehet, heillä ei myöskään ollut mahdollisuutta vaikuttaa vallitseviin käsityksiin. Koska avioliitto oli useimmille naiselle välttämättömyys toimeentulon turvaamiseksi, oletan, että asetettuihin normeihin oli hyödyllistä myöntyä. Lisäksi uskon, että normeihin sopiva käytös siirtyi myös helposti äidiltä tyttarelle, eikä sitä juurikaan kyseenalaistettu.

6.2 Rivit 258-267 (Choose No Evil Wife, s. 31-33)

Rivit 258-267 jatkavat edellistä teemaa ja sisältävät kuvauksen siitä, mikä seuraus ohjeen uskomatta tai tottelematta jättämisellä on. Lyhykäisyydessään runossa näillä riveillä todetaan useaan kertaan, että se, joka huonon vaimon valitsee, tulee elämässään onnettomaksi. Koska avioliitto oli naiselle välttämättömyys toimeentulon turvaamiseksi, naisten oli syytä elää mahdollisimman moitteettomasti ja hyväksyttävällä tavalla. Toinen tapa toimeentulolle oli ryhtyä nunnaksi, joka antoi naiselle tietynlaisia vapauksia – esimerkiksi mahdollisuuden hankkia luku- ja kirjoitustaitoa – mutta sisälsi myös uskonnon vuoksi tiukempia rajoituksia kuin normaali elämä luostareiden ulkopuolella. Vaimot olivat ikään kuin miestensä alaisuudessa samoin kuin nunnat olivat viime kädessä papiston ja kirkon johtajien alaisuudessa, eli varsinaisesti vapaita naiset eivät olleet kummassakaan tapauksessa.

6.3 Rivit 268-284 (Choose No Evil Wife, s. 33-35)

Rivit 268-284 ovat Skeatin aiheotsikoinnista huolimatta eri osiota kuin kaksi edellistä. Otsikoinnin virheellisyys johtuu Skeatin edition (1907) sivujaosta, jossa kyseisellä otsikolla merkityllä sivulla alkaa kuitenkin jo uusi osio. Riveillä 268-284 kerrotaan siitä, kuinka terävä kieli naisella on. Miestä neuvotaan olemaan kertomatta vaimolleen kaikkia asioitaan, koska nainen voi pienistäkin miehen vastoinkäymisistä johtuen alkaa piinata ja sättää miestä. Nainen ei voi kontrolloida puhettaan, vaikka toivoisi niin.

6.4 Rivit 285-295 (Keep Thy Wife Busy, s. 35-39)

Osiossa *Keep Thy Wife Busy* käsitellään naisen luontaista taipumusta laiskuuteen ja pahantekoon. Vaimo tulee pitää kiireisenä kotitöissä, jotta hän ei ehdi paneutua ilkeyksiin tai saada ilkeitä ideoita liiasta vapaa-ajasta johtuen. Samaa aiheuttaa myös ylimielisyys, joten tekstin mukaan ”kotitöissä hikoilu” tekee nöyräksi. Tässä osiossa on mahdollisesti viittaus kahteen sananlaskuun. Ensiksi osion viimeisillä riveillä (294-295) lukee: ”Þeyh hit is vuel to buwe / Þat beo nule treowe”. Tutkijat eivät ole olleet yksimielisiä siitä, mihin kyseisillä

riveillä tarkalleen ottaen viitataan (s. 37-38). Todennäköisimmin kyse on joko viittauksesta samantyyliiseen sananlaskuun kuin ”nuorna vitsa väännettävä” (Borgström 1908: 58-59), jolla tässä tarkoitetaan sitä, että nainen pitää pienestä asti opettaa tottelevaiseksi, tai vanhahtavasta tavasta todeta, että on vaikea taivuttaa sitä, mikä ei ole luotu taipumaan.

Toiseksi osiosta löytyy sananlasku, jossa todetaan vapaasti suomennettuna, että ”Paholainen löytää toimettomille käsille tekemistä” (s. 38). Kristinoppi on siis yhtenä perusteena myös siinä, että *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n mukaan nainen tulee pitää kiireisenä. Nainen on raamatun käsityksen mukaan kuitenkin vilpillinen ja tottelematon (ns. kirjallisuuden Eeva-tyyppin lähestymistapa naiseen, ks. yllä).

6.5 Rivit 296-305 (Keep Thy Wife Busy, s. 39-41)

Rivit 296-305 jatkavat samaa osiota kuin rivit 285-295. Riveiltä 296-297 löytyy eri muodossa sananlasku ”Like father like son”, joskin tässä esimerkkinä on, negatiivisessa mielessä, käytetty naista: riveillä todetaan, että nainen seuraa äitinsä esimerkkiä. Myös tässä voi huomata *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n misogynistisen asenteen: tekstissä ei anneta ymmärtää, että hyväkäytöksinen ja lempeä nainen kasvattaa samanlaisia tyttäriä vaan, että huonokäytöksinen, laiska ja pahantekoon taipuvainen nainen kasvattaa samanlaisia tyttäriä.

6.6 Rivit 306-316 (Woman Is Deceitful, s. 41-44)

Riveillä 306-316 tarjotaan vertauksi sille, kuinka ulkonäkö ja iloinen luonne voi pettää – todellisuus ihmisestä paljastuu myöhemmin ja on jotain täysin muuta. Riveiltä löytyy eri muodoissaan sananlaskuja, jotka suomeksi kääntyvät esimerkiksi ”ei kaikki kultaa, mikä kiiltää” tai ”moni kakku päältä kaunis”. Lisäksi myös näillä riveillä todetaan, että isiensä valvonnan alaisuudessa nainen voi vaikuttaa hyväkäytöksiseltä ja kauniilta, mutta pinnan alla totuus onkin täysin päinvastainen.

6.7 Rivit 317-328 (Avoid Women's Advice, s. 44-47)

Osiossa, joka löytyy riveiltä 317-328, käsitellään sitä, kuinka naisen neuvoon ei voi luottaa. Runon ohjeiden ja varoitusten mukaisesti: jos nainen jostakin syystä vihastuu, hän itkee vihasta, ja hän itkee myös saadakseen tahtonsa läpi, joka tilanteessa sekä tehdäkseen kiusaa miehelle. Mieder (1993: 65, s. 20, 46) toteaa, että lähes jokainen sananlasku, jossa nainen mainitaan, kuvaa naisen negatiivisessa valossa. Vaikka misogynia oli keskiaikaisissa kirjoituksissa tavallista (Mann 2002: 57), siitä saatettiin myös tehdä pilaa ja liioitella sitä (s. 46-47). Tämä kertoo mielestäni siitä, että misogynistinen asenne tekstissä ei vastaa todellisuutta. Jos tietynlainen negatiivinen asenteellisuus (tässä: ns. Eeva-tyyppi, ks. yllä) nähdään ja kuvataan naurun aiheena, se kertoo enemmänkin todellisuudesta, jossa ihmiset uskovat naisen olevan arvokas ja tärkeä yhteiskunnan jäsen.

6.8 Rivit 329-342 (Women's Counsel Is Cold, s. 47-53)

Riveillä 329-330 viitataan kuningas Salomon viisauksiin, jonka jälkeen raamatullisessa hengessä varoitetaan jälleen naisten neuvojen seuraamisesta. Salomon sananlaskut mainitsemalla *The Proverbs of Alfred* hakee omille viisauksilleen lisää auktoriteettia (s. 48) vaikka todellisuudessa kyseistä tai edes kyseisen kaltaista sananlaskua ei Salomon sananlaskuissa ole. Riveillä 335-336 on viittaus aitoon sananlaskuun: islannissa on sananlasku ”kylmä neuvo on naisen neuvo”. Nainen kuvataan siis jälleen välinpitämättömäksi ja tunteettomaksi. Schieberle (2007: 92-99) on tutkinut sitä, miten nainen on nähty neuvonantajana. Hän (ibid.) toteaa, että esimerkiksi teoksessa *Confessio Amantis* (iältään noin sata vuotta nuorempi kuin Jesus MS) nainen nähdään hyvänä neuvojana, joka saa kovasydämisen kuninkaan osoittamaan lempeyttä ja armollisuutta vähäosaisille ja ”feminisoi” mieshallitsijaa. Nainen kuvataan viisaana, kilttinä ja myös hyvällä tavalla ovelana (s. 50); hän käyttää alhaista sosiaalista asemaansa hyväkseen näyttääkseen nöyrältä ja saadakseen niin neuvojaan paremmin läpi.

Sivulla 50 mainitaan Jesus MS:stä puuttuvat kaksi riviä, joilla toisessa käsikirjoituksessa (Trinity MS) lukee suomeksi: ”hän ei voi tehdä toisin,

koska hän jo varhain näin aloitti”. Tässä on jälleen viittaus raamattuun ja Eevaan, joka kiellosta huolimatta söi kielletyn hedelmän ja sai aikaan karkoituksen paratiisista. Nainen ei pysty kieltämään tai muuttamaan luontoaan, joka periytyy aivan alusta asti.

7 RUNONLAUSUNTA JA YLEISÖ

Volk-Birke on tutkinut tapaa, jolla keskiaikaisessa tekstissä vedotaan yleisöön. Hänen esimerkkeinään ovat saarnaaminen sekä *The Canterbury Tales*. Samankaltaisia elementtejä yleisön vakuuttamiseen löytyy myös *The Proverbs of Alfred*:sta. Yleisöön vedotaan muun muassa kertomalla viisauksien lähde (auktoiteetti) sekä toistamalla tärkeäksi koettuja opetuksia (s. 50). *The Proverbs of Alfred* hyödyntää keskiaikaisen saarnauksen keinoja ja toisaalta sisältää hyvin samanlaisia elementtejä kuin kertomakirjallisuuden teos *The Canterbury Tales*. Volk-Birke ehdottaa (1991: 303), että vaikka runonlausunnasta ei löydy teoksista konkreettisia merkkejä, *The Canterbury Tales* (sekä, lisäksi, *The Proverbs of Alfred*) voivat hyvin todennäköisesti olla suunnattuja nimenomaan yleisölle luettavaksi. Ääneen lukeminen oli keskiajalla kaikkein tärkein opetustapa, koska sillä tavoitettiin suuri määrä ihmisiä eikä vallinneesta lukutaidottomuudesta muodostunut estettä tekstin tuntemiselle (Volk-Birke 1991: 26).

Cannon (2010: 414-416) kokee, että *The Proverbs of Alfred* voisi alkujaan olla laajan yleisön sijasta tarkoitettu koulukirjaksi. Tämän puolesta puhuu se, että se paitsi muistuttaa saarnaa, sisältää runollisia elementtejä (alliteraatio, rytmi, riimit), jotka helpottavat kuullun muistamista. Lisäksi Cannonin (2010: 414) mukaan *The Proverbs of Alfred* ei tarjoa mitään varsinaisia opetuksia papistolle tai ritareille vaan ennemminkin kertoo iän mukanaan tuomia huomioita ja opetuksia ja pyrkii siirtämään tällaista tietoa nuoremmalle sukupolvelle. Myös tämä voisi puhua sen puolesta, että kyseessä on koulukirja, jota olisi voitu käyttää esimerkiksi puhtaasti lukemisen ja kirjoittamisen oppimiseen, mutta koska keskiaikaisesta runonlausunnasta tai ääneen lukemisesta ei ole säilynyt teoksessa minkäänlaista merkintää, sen alkuperäistä tarkoitusta on mahdotonta yksiselitteisesti osoittaa (Frank 2003: 158). Kenties teos on suunnattu monenlaisille yleisöille.

8 YHTEENVETO

Kun lähdin tutkimaan teosta *The Proverbs of Alfred*, en heti tiennyt, onko sen tarkoitus olla vakavasti otettava vai onko se tehty huumorimielellä. Johtuen tietynlaisesta sarkasmista ja humoristisista esimerkeistä (huonon vaimon valinnut surullinen mies, joka kovin suree ja valittaa huonoa valintaansa) sekä runollisista elementeistä (esimerkiksi riimit) oletan, että kyseessä on viihteellinen runo, joka on myös saattanut palvella koulukirjana (Cannon 2010: 414).

Puhuja, Alfred Suuri (tässä teoksessa fiktiivinen tai todellinen), on mies, joka antaa neuvoja toisille miehille. Naiset ovat neuvojina täysin poissuljettuja ja kukaan ei ”feminisoi” puhujan neuvoja. Voiko tähän olla syynä se, että miehille annettuna ”maskuliinisilla” neuvoilla on enemmän arvoa ja auktoriteettia? Kenties maskuliininen tyyli olisi voinut toimia hyvin koulukirjassa, koska koulutus tavoitti nimenomaan nuoria miehiä. Kirjaimellisesti tekstissä on jotakin melkein jokaiselle; ohjeita kirkonmiehille, ylhäisölle ja sotilaille. Naisille suoraan kohdennetut ohjeet tai kannustus puuttuvat. Pääasiassa kuitenkin neuvot ovat melko yleisluontoisia ja myös yleistietoa: ihmisiä kehoitetaan pelkäämään ja kunnioittamaan Jumalaa, ottamaan esimerkiksi köyhät huomioon, kuuntelemaan päälliköitä ja heidän antamiaan neuvoja sekä muuta vastaavaa. Nämä sopivat todellisuudessa yleisiksi elämänohjeiksi kenelle tahansa.

Huolimatta niistä sananlaskuista, joita tekstissä on, tekstiä ei voi kategorisoida sananlaskuiksi. Tältä osin otsikko ei siis vastaa sisältöä. Teos on kuitenkin viisaukirjallisuutta, ja samankaltaista siltä osin, että myös sananlaskujen odotetaan yleisesti ottaen kertovan lyhyitä ja ytimekkäitä viisauksia. Sananlaskujen myös odotetaan usein olevan sisäistettyjä ihmisten kulloiseenkin kielenkäyttöön. *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n kohdalla näyttäisi siltä, että vähintäänkin misogynistinen tapa kuvata naista on nimenomaan tuttua kirjan aikalaisille ja sisäistynyttä heidän puheessaan. Voi myös olla, että koska tyyli oli niin tavanomaista (Clark 1997: 117, Mann 2002: 26), ihmiset ovat keskiajalla jopa toivoneet sellaista kirjallisuudessa. Tällainen arvomaailma on tunnettu myös nykyään ja kuten Mieder (1993: 70-71) toteaa, misogynististen sananlaskujen vaikutuksien korjaamiseen menee todennäköisesti pitkään.

Riveillä 247-342 kerrotaan naisen lukemattomista huonoista puolista ja neuvotaan, miten häntä pidetään kurissa. Viimeisillä neljällä rivillä (339-342) annetaan naisille kuitenkin lievä tunnustus: vapaasti suomennettuna ”en sano tätä siksi, etteikö hyvä nainen olisi hyvä asia, jos mies vain voi tunnistaa ja saada hänet.” Väitän kuitenkin, että tämäkin kehu kohdistuu itse asiassa enemmän mieheen. Tekstin piiloviesti on ikään kuin se, että mies, joka osaa valita hyvän (normeja noudattavan) naisen, on hyvä ja viisas mies. Naista ei niinkään kehuta vaan todetaan yleisluontoisesti, että heitä on olemassa hyviäkin.

Todennäköisesti *The Proverbs of Alfred*:lla ei ollut sellaista yhteiskunnallista vaikutusta kuin alun perin luulin. Vertasin sitä lähinnä katekismukseen, mutta mitä pidemmälle asiaa tutkin, tulin enemmän siihen tulokseen, että teoksen tavoite on viihde tai kouluopetus. Naisen asemaa tukevia lähteitä on tutkielman kannalta ollut haastava löytää, ja tärkein syy on se, että naisten kirjoittamia tekstejä ei ole. Naiset, jos miehetkään, eivät keskiajalla pääsääntöisesti olleet luku- ja kirjoitustaitoisia, ja säilyneistä kirjoituksista kaikki ovat joko miesten tai ylhäisönaisten tai korkea-arvoisten nunnien tekemiä. Tavallisen kansan naisista ja heidän arkipäivästään kertovia luotettavia lähteitä ei löydy.

Ajan kanssa kertomakirjallisuuden tyylihin tuli enemmän variaatiota kuin Eeva/Maria -kahtiajako. *The Canterbury Tales*:ssa naisia kuvataan myös iloisina ja vahvempina hahmoina ilkeiden ja petollisten vaimojen sijasta, ja nykyajan kirjallisuudessa *The Proverbs of Alfred*:n tyyli kuvata naisia tuntuisi, oikeutetusti, hyvin vanhentuneelta. Toivon, että naisten sosiaalisen aseman tutkiminen jatkuisi ja lisää tietoa heidän arkielämästään keskiajalla voitaisiin löytää ja yhteenvetää teoksista, joissa naiset ihmisryhmänä mainitaan.